

和ヶ原聯司

イラスト

029

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Illustration

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電撃文庫

Hataraku Maou-sama! Volume 13

Contents

- Illustrations
- Prologue
- Chapter 1: The Demon King, Adopting a Tough Stance
- Chapter 2: The Hero, Troubled because of a Confusing Situation
- Chapter 3: The High School Girl, Finding the Guide to Her Heart
- Chapter 4: The Demon King and the Hero, Staring Directly at the Truth
- Author, Afterword –AND YOU–
- Translator's Notes and References
- Credits

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CONTENTS

PROLOGUE

**THE DEMON KING,
ADOPTING A TOUGH STANCE**

**THE HERO,
TROUBLED BECAUSE OF A CONFUSING SITUATION**

**THE HIGH SCHOOL GIRL,
FINDING THE GUIDE TO HER HEART**

**THE DEMON KING AND THE HERO,
STARING DIRECTLY AT THE TRUTH**

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HATARAKU
MAOU-SAMA-

Prologue

During the evening when the lower hem of the curtain known as night was about to cover the world, *that* arrived at the human dwelling which was resisting living within the darkness.

Sharp eyes staring into the darkness. Roars which forcefully attracted the attention of those who were listening. A stature much larger than those from the same clan. The amount of food which could fit into its stomach. Covering its entire body was a red colour which would not lose to the darkness.

In all aspects, it had an impressive and dignified appearance, which was suited for galloping in the evening.

However, to explain how ominous *that* was, only one sentence was enough.

That was the mount of the King of Demons.

Whether it was the eyes which emitted a sharp light, or the roars which came from its stomach, its huge stature, or its capacity for food. All of this existed for the sake of being ridden on by the King who stood at the top of all demons.

Riding on *that*, the King of Demons was also wearing a dark red jacket, which was not inferior to *that*, watching the human world, which was close to being covered by darkness with a determined gaze.

A short while later, the King of Demons and his mount arrived at the human dwelling which was going to enter the darkness in various ways.

Regardless of how much people combined their forces, they could not stop the moving of the universe, the humans who lamented that today's sun was going to set as well, defying the darkness in order to protect their lives, they kept producing light within the darkness.

The King of Demons who wore a dark red jacket hung his dark red helmet on the seat, and took one merciless step towards that light.

Compared to its master who was preparing to visit the human dwelling, the mount closed its eyes, stopped its low pitched roaring, and slightly leaned its body which had been galloping until now to the side, resting and waiting.

The black legs of the King of Demons walked with powerful footsteps, approaching the human dwelling step by step.

In a flash, the King of Demons was in front of a flimsy-looking wooden door.

To the King of Demons, breaking down this door was an easy thing to do.

But the Demon King did not do so.

He focused for a short while, listened to the human voices which were heard from within. In the next moment, a smile befitting of the King of Demons appeared on his face, and he opened his mouth slowly.

That was a voice which would alarm all who were listening.

That was a voice which would awaken the desires of all who were listening.

That was a voice which would cause all who were listening to open the door to welcome the Demon King.

"Thank you for waiting! This is MgRonalds Delivery!"

"Ah, it was Maou-san after all! Please wait a moment, I'm opening the door now!"

Following the voice of a young lady from the other side of the door, the unreliable cylindrical lock was unlocked.

"Thank you for the hard work, Maou-san!"

".....Hi, Chi-chan."

Wearing a windbreaker with the same colour as the MgRonalds sign, MgRonalds employee Maou Sadao relaxed his initial professional smile slightly to respond with an honest smile to Sasaki Chiho, the young lady who welcomed him, greeting her.

Room 201 of Villa Rosa Sasazuka, a wooden two story apartment located in Tokyo Shibuya ward, Sasazuka.

This was Maou Sadao's destination for the Happy Delivery this time.

In fact, this was his home.

This morning, Maou Sadao had left this room to go to the MgRonalds in front of Hatagaya station to report to work.

This apartment was within the delivery range, so the delivery had to be carried out as long as a customer requested for it. This was the responsibility of Maou Sadao who was the King of Demons, as well as an employee of MgRonalds.

However, while taking out the hamburger set meal from the insulation bag which was hanging from his shoulders, confirming the items against the order, and handing the products to Chiho, Maou was showing an unhappy expression uncharacteristic of an employee and shouted into the room, "I don't have much right to say such a thing, but eating such portions two meals in a row is really too much."

"Uh, sorry..... I didn't have such intentions in the afternoon."

The one who showed a guilty expression within the room was a middle aged man with a solid build.

"Because Acies-chan was unwilling to listen at all. I don't know how she managed to find out that Nord-san had acceded to Iron's request to order MgRonalds. Ah, with this, all the ordered items are accounted for."

Chiho and Maou compared against the order together, and at the same time, they confirmed that all the items had been delivered.

The man who Chiho addressed as Nord took out a 5000 yen note from his wallet and handed it to Maou.

"Let me say the unpleasant things first, an archangel who you humans worship became so fat in one week that he had to see a doctor. We have to deliver as long as someone orders, but don't forget that managing a child's health is the responsibility of the adults. Uh, I received 5000 yen..... the change is 450 yen."

Only during the moment of receiving money and handing back the change, the employee's soul within Maou caused him to switch back to the tone used by an employee.

“.....Yeah, I will remember it well.”

Unable to rebuke, just as Nord nodded and replied, noisy footsteps were heard from below the public corridor.

“The delivery came, right!”

“I’m hungry.”

“Uwah!”

Two slim and small shadows ran past Maou on his left and right side respectively, rushing into Room 201.

“Wait a moment, Acies! Iron! Make sure you wash your hands first!”

As if she was chasing after the two of them, a lady frantically ran up the stairs.

“Ahh~ both of you, don’t eat them directly after taking them out of the bag, at least put them properly on the table first.”

“Even if you say that, I’m hungry! Which one did Iron eat in the afternoon?”

“This one. Is it called mayonnaise? It’s tasty.”

“Mayonnaise is tasty right! But I ate this before, I want to start eating what I haven’t eaten before!”

“The person who came in the afternoon said this was available for a ‘limited period’.”

“Since it’s limited, then I have to eat it! I’m digging in!”

“I’m digging in.”

Two children had run in.

A girl with a streak of purple hair amongst her silver hair—Acies=Ara, and the boy with a streak of red hair amongst his black hair—Iron, as if they were not listening to the words of restraint from the adults, they immediately started eating the MgRonalds burger meals which Maou had brought over.

“Both of you..... wash your hands.....”

A purple haired woman who had entered as she chased after Acies and Iron, and Nord, who was already in the room, stared at both the children in a

stunned manner.

“Hey, Lailah.”

The woman, who noticed Maou’s presence only after hearing his low voice, turned towards Maou in a stiff manner.

“Acies and Iron are completely running circles around the both of you.”

“No, this is—”

“Out of respect of the Landlady and Amane-san, if Chi-chan’s or Ashiya’s agreement was sought beforehand, I will allow all of you to freely enter and leave Room 201. However, if all of you dare to make a mess while eating in here, we from the Demon King Army, will not stay quiet about this.”

“.....Yes.””

Faced with the reasonable reminder from the Demon King who was working at a fast food restaurant, even if they had lived for a long time, Lailah, the archangel from Heaven, and Nord, the father of the Hero from a foreign world, could only quietly bow their heads.

Then—

“There’s no need to worry!”

As if to blow away the heavy atmosphere, standing at the side, Chiho clenched her fists and said, “After I heard about what happened in the afternoon, to ensure that Iron and Acies-chan ate vegetables, I made boiled Komatsuna^[1] and cabbage salad and brought them over.”

In fact, airtight containers which Maou knew very well were placed on the table.

“In addition, Ashiya-san also said that the nutrition would not be balanced if there was only meat, so he went out to buy fish. He was troubled over whether he should buy mackerel or salmon though.”

“I see. That’s good, that’s good.”

Chiho’s meticulous care, and his loyal subject who properly took care of the home even when the master was not at home, caused Maou to show a smile

for a short moment, then—

“Feel ashamed, adult. Feel ashamed, angel.”

He sternly reproached Nord and Lailah.

““I feel ashamed about this.””

The parents of the Hero honestly bowed their heads to the Demon King’s reproach.

“Not considering Ashiya, rather than Sasaki Chiho, they should get my permission first, right?”

Urushihara Hanzo, whose order of approval was lower than Chiho despite being an inhabitant of this room, protested this in a low volume knowing that the other party would ignore him.

“.....Then, thank you for everyone’s patronage. I look forward to hearing from all of you again.”

“Thank you for the hard work, Maou-san. You have to work until closing time today right, do your best!”

“Yeah, sorry about that, Chi-chan, always troubling you so much. Remember to let Ashiya or Suzuno know when you’re leaving.”

“Alright!”

After the Demon King handed full authority of his home—the Demon Fortress—to a high school girl, he quickly walked towards Dullahan II which he had ridden on for the delivery.

“Demon King, wait a moment.”

Just as the Demon King was about to reach the bottom of the stairs, he heard a voice coming from above his head.

Looking up, he saw that his neighbour Suzuno was leaning outwards from the common corridor.

Then next to Suzuno’s feet, there was a cute shadow which was stretching its body with all its might and waving with all its effort.

“Papa! Papa!”

That was Alas=Ramus who was entrusted into Suzuno's care while her 'parents' Maou and Emi were at work.

"Be careful on the way! Do your best!"

".....Oh!"

Hiding his anxious feelings of being unable to stay at his daughter's side, Maou composed himself and waved in response to the voice of his 'daughter', and with a gaze, he thanked Suzuno who had allowed him and his daughter to meet.

"Alright, Alas=Ramus, the weather is cold, let's go back."

"Suzu nee-chan, are we not eating MgRonron?"

"About that. We have to wait until Alas=Ramus grows a little older to be able to eat as much as Acies."

"Acies was eating it though....."

When Maou had gotten on his bike and put on his helmet, he could still intermittently hear the voices of Suzuno and Alas=Ramus from the common corridor.

Just as he recovered slightly from work fatigue due to hearing his daughter's voice thanks to the thoughtfulness of his neighbour—

"Ah, Demon King-sama. Thank you for your hard work."

A familiar voice was heard from behind him.

"Oh, I heard you went to buy fish?"

Maou pushed up the visor of his helmet, and lightly waved to Ashiya who had gone out shopping just as Chiho had mentioned.

"That's right, I could not overlook the immaturity of the Justina couple. I heard that when those two children were at the Landlady's house, they were also eating all the time. If Sasaki-san and I do not teach them how to pay attention to their health, Acies and Iron will bring harm to their bodies sooner or later."

"If they end up harming their bodies, I wonder what would happen."

Having seen how Iron had ended up at Villa Rosa, Maou thought that it would be better to properly supervise the physical conditions of the children of the Sephirah, however it looked like the people around them did not do such a thing at all.

“Thank you for your hard work.”

“It’s nothing, it’s nothing. In the long run, this is also for the sake of the Demon King Army in the future. Ah, Demon King-sama, would it be alright to have grilled mackerel with salt tonight?”

“It’s been a while since I’ve eaten mackerel. I’ll leave it to you.”

After Maou nodded, he released the handbrakes and started the engine.

“I’ll be going off first.”

“Alright, please be careful on the way.”

After waving lightly, Maou rode the Moped to return to MgRonalds.

Just as he was very lucky not to encounter any red lights on the way back and returned to the store—

“You came back at the right time, we just received another delivery order.”

—as if waiting for him to return, Yusa Emi, with many identities at the same time as Maou’s enemy, the Hero, Nord and Lailah’s daughter, and Alas=Ramus’s mother, and currently also Maou’s colleague, was on standby with the order slip.

“This is the address. This is the contents of the order. The meal will be ready in three minutes. Kawa-ffiti and Kisaki-san have gone out, so I’m counting on you, Maou-san.”

“.....Yeah.”

Regardless of how much time had passed, Maou still could not get used to Emi respectfully addressing him with ‘-san’.

“It’s there, huh. That company has already ordered many times from us.”

“That’s right. However, by coincidence, all the previous deliveries to that place have been handled by Kisaki-san, so don’t disappoint them.”

“Please don’t raise such impossible requests.”

Emi smiled like she was playing a prank and Maou could only respond with a wry smile.

The Shop Manager of the MgRonalds in front of Hatagaya station, Kisaki Mayumi, had the figure and physical appearance rivalling that of a model, and she even had many supporters who patronised the store just for her sake.

“Oh yes, I saw Alas=Ramus for a bit just now, it seems like she was quietly keeping watch over the house.”

“That child would not cause trouble for Bell or her home. Rather than that, did that order come from my father after all?”

“.....That’s right.”

Maou briefly explained about Nord and Lailah’s situation.

“When I have a chance, I need to apologise and thank Chiho-chan properly.....”

“You do owe Chi-chan a lot, but you need to think of how to handle your parents first, right?”

“.....”

Emi went quiet.

Because of many reasons in the past, Emi’s and Lailah’s current relationship was to be considered extremely perilous.

“You haven’t spoken to her at all, right? I don’t want to interfere in your family matters, it’s just that this will cause a lot of trouble to us and Chi-chan, so I hope you can settle things quickly.”

“I-I know that.”

From this response, it could be seen that Emi just knew it and had no plans to act at all, and at this moment, Maou saw a few insulating bags filled with the orders for the delivery behind the counter.

“Sigh, work still takes priority currently. I’m going off.”

“.....Yeah.”

Maou cut off his conversation with Emi, confirmed the order and accepted the insulating bags over the counter, then rushed out of the store.

He put on his helmet once again, got on the Moped, released the handbrakes, turned the key which was tied to his belt by a rope to start the engine, and drove lightly on the streets where the sun was close to setting completely.

When he encountered a red light on the way, Maou recalled Emi's melancholy expression.

"She has also experienced many things, huh."

He mumbled softly under the helmet.

Although all of them harboured their own problems, as long as they continuously met and worked with other people, various expressions which included smiles could still be glimpsed.

"This is also an important part of daily life."

At this moment, the traffic signal turned to green, and as if to dispel his distracting thoughts, Maou applied a little more force when he turned the accelerator.

The exhaust and exhalation turned into a white tail. A strong presence of winter was already drifting in the streets.



**THE
DEMON KING,
ADOPTING A
TOUGH STANCE**

Chapter 1: The Demon King, Adopting a Tough Stance

Chiho, who had returned to the employee room after changing in the changing room after ending work in the evening, was confirming that there were no issues with the work shifts in December when she suddenly felt that something was off.

MgRonalds' work shift schedule was recorded in a roster form, and Chiho was normally listed as Number 13.

However, in the work shift schedule which was given to her, she had become Number 12.

By the way, Maou was Number 9, and Emi was Number 25. Maou's number did not change this time, and Emi had become Number 24.

After thinking about it for a bit, Chiho opened the notebook which she used to record the work shifts and discovered one thing.

"I understand! We're missing Kouta!"

Someone who could also be considered one of the main forces among the younger employees, the university student Kouta—Nakayama Koutarou's row had disappeared.

"He seem to have said that he needed to start looking for a job. I see. So he did resign after all."

She had heard it from the people around her and the person himself, but once she saw that his name had truly disappeared, she still felt the passage of time despite not wanting to.

"He's really not around anymore....."

Koutarou was a university student, and Chiho was a high school student. It

was assumed that the two of them would have many things to talk about since they were close in age, but in reality, Chiho and Koutarou had never talked about any deep topics.

Of course, this did not mean that they were on bad relations. When they were working together on the same shift, they would chat normally and Koutarou was also the senior at work, so he would frequently guide Chiho on work related matters.

However, when thinking calmly about it afterwards, with regards to any personal matters regarding Nakayama Koutarou, Chiho only knew that his residence and university were in Hatagaya, and that his hobby was playing games.

Chiho normally did not play games, so she was unable to talk to him about such topics. As for topics related to university life, Kawada Takefumi and Ooki Akiko, who were also university students, were better people to talk with.

With regards to their personal lives, there was only one time when Chiho had mentioned that she was practicing archery did Koutarou say that his girlfriend was also practicing western style archery. Although it was not known if this could be considered a common topic, the two of them ended up chatting very enthusiastically about the topic of ‘bows and arrows’.

However, they had only spoken for a little more than ten minutes within the employee room.

Chiho’s understanding about this senior named Nakayama Koutarou was only at the standard of what she could remember in these few minutes.

Even so, someone around Chiho, whom she naturally thought would exist around her, had left.

This shocked her.

This feeling was probably almost the same as Middle School graduation.

She was not very familiar with everyone in the school, but the people around her who naturally were part of her surroundings suddenly disappeared after a certain day, this caused her to develop a mysterious feeling of sorrow which could not be easily described.

“What’s wrong, Chi-chan? Your brows are furrowed.”

“Ah, Kisaki-san.”

At this moment, the shop manager of the MgRonalds in front of Hatagaya station, Kisaki Mayumi, who had taken off her cap and her microphone headphones, entered the room. Chiho looked up and replied, “I wanted to take the opportunity to copy the work shifts into my notebook, then I noticed that Kouta-san’s shifts had disappeared.”

“Yeah. Actually, I had hoped that he would be able to stay until the end of the year, but even if the start of the job-hunting period had been delayed, considering the lessons at university and various preparations, holding onto him for one more month would have resulted in a huge impact. However, even if we hire someone new, it will not be easy to fill up the gap Kouta left behind, it’s really a headache.”

Kisaki sounded nonchalant while saying this, but she would never lie or joke about work related issues.

Koutarou had created a huge gap.

Especially for the MgRonalds in front of Hatagaya station, this did not just affect the work shifts. Lacking one work comrade who worked well with everyone caused all of them to feel the stress.

“Is Kisaki-san getting off work as well?”

After Chiho saw that Kisaki had not just taken off her cap and headphones but also loosened her tie, Chiho asked thus.

“No. I’m going to another store to attend an emergency district meeting. Choosing now of all times. Maa-kun is taking a break today as well, I hope nothing urgent occurs.”

As Kisaki sighed, she looked up towards the clock.

It was almost dinner period, but the store-in-charge was not in the store, this situation would negatively affect those employees who were staying, and the store-in-charge who was forced to leave would also feel extremely uneasy.

Especially today when Maou had no shifts at all, seeing this from Kisaki’s point

of view, she probably did not want to attend the meeting.

Having one less person around and having gone through the experience of being short-handed, one would discover that the impact of having one less person was bigger than normal.

“During this period of time, any other store will be short-handed like us. And the workload has increased recently, it is possible that even the headquarter employees will have to be pulled out to help, it’s really one misfortune after another,” Kisaki said with a shrug. “Because there are many little things to settle, I won’t be coming back today. I will make it such that all of you will be able to contact me during emergencies. As for the rest of today, I will leave it to Kawa-ccchi, Aki-chan, and Saemi to handle things.”

“I see.....”

Not coming back today, Chiho seemed to have interpreted it as something completely different, this caused her frown to deepen.

Seeing Chiho’s expression, Kisaki displayed a rare moment of hesitation and said to Chiho, “That’s how things are, if Chi-chan also encounters a similar situation, you should say so earlier, okay?”

“Eh? May I know what you mean by that?”

Unable to understand the meaning behind Kisaki’s words, Chiho momentarily did not know how to answer.

“Uh, honestly speaking, I also hope that Chi-chan can try her best and work here until the last moment, but that won’t be possible after all, right?”

“What do you mean?”

Chiho did not recall requesting for long breaks or a change in shifts, and seeing that she was genuinely confused, it was Kisaki who said this in a troubled manner instead, “It’s winter of second year right now. I think the people around you should have started discussing about preparing for exams, right?”

“Exams..... huh?”

Chiho, who had finally understood what Kisaki wanted to say, reacted and shouted out.

"Hey hey, high school student. I don't want to take the opportunity to make use of the other party because the person herself has forgotten, can you please have more self awareness?"

Knowing that Chiho truly had not grasped the situation, Kisaki's wry smile deepened.

"You will be promoted to third year soon. I don't think that Chi-chan, who was so troubled before, would choose her own future path carelessly. When it's time to properly prepare for the exams, you won't be able to work the same shifts as before, right?"

"T-that's true."

Chiho noticed that her heartbeat had quickened, as if someone had shouted at her as she turned around the corner.

Was she not thinking about such things when she had gone to the house of Emi's friend earlier?

However, for her to feel shocked now, this meant that in her heart, she still thought of exams and future path as things which were still far away.

Kisaki knew how troubled Chiho was about her future path, more than her parents, teachers, and friends.

That was because Chiho confessed this during her work interview and had frequently discussed with Kisaki about this afterwards.

"When that time..... really comes, I will properly discuss this with Kisaki-san again."

"I'm counting on you. This is also for your own good."

Kisaki did not say anything else afterwards, and walked into the changing room to change her clothes.

Hearing the room's door close, Chiho suddenly opened the employee room door slightly to observe the situation within the store.

"One day, I won't come here anymore?"

Sooner or later, she would no longer come to this store where she had

worked for less than a year.

A day like this would definitely arrive.

This stern truth caused a dull feeling of anguish within her chest.

The air outside did not flow indoors, but she still felt her body turn cold. Just as Chiho put on her down jacket which she wore to work and sighed—

“Why are you still here?”

“Kyah!”

This time, she jumped up in shock because someone tapped her shoulder from behind.

“You’re dressed warmly.”

Kisaki, who was wearing a windbreaker, looked at Chiho who was not just wearing a down jacket, but was dressed thickly from head to toe.

“Ah, because I am going somewhere else later.....”

“I see. It is good to dress warmer, but it’s already dark outside, so go home earlier okay?”

Kisaki gave this natural reminder with her status as an adult, and Chiho nodded honestly.

After that, Kisaki stood beside Chiho, and mimicking Chiho, she looked at the store from the employee room and said, “Let me say this first.”

“Y-yes.”

“This is not a place where you can stay forever. To Maa-kun, Saemi, and of course, me as well, this store is just a transition area in life. As for the amount of time spent here, it is different for everyone.”

“.....I’ve been here for less than a year too.”

“If Chi-chan feels that the time spent working here is still short, then I personally feel very happy.”

Even if it was just a transitional period, Chiho still honestly expressed that she had only stayed here for a short time, Kisaki showed a kind smile to Chiho who

acted this way.

"It's fine to trouble over it a little more. The choices made at a certain moment in the past, and the choices which will be made in the future, whether those choices are correct or not, those adults in the world who appear to be confident, have also forged their path while being troubled over these things."

Having been told this again, Chiho also felt that this was obvious, but until someone told her this, she had never thought of this at all.

Looking at the backs of the MgRonalds employees through the gap in the door once again, Chiho sighed.

Everyone was probably like that as well.

Maou and Emi were probably like that as well.

".....Thank you for your hard work. I'll be leaving first."

"Yeah, be careful on the way back."

At least this was not a problem which could be solved by feeling troubled in this place by herself.

After Chiho bowed her head towards Kisaki, she quickly stuffed her things into her bag and left the store.

The outdoors, which was separated by the automatic door, was filled with cold air that gradually stole away the warmth from her body and cheeks which had warmed up because of work.

"Whether the choices made in the future are correct or not huh, sigh....."

After Chiho's sigh dissipated into the air—

"I have to be quick."

She walked forward determinedly.

Today was the day Chiho would witness the 'negotiation' between Maou and Lailah for the first time at Room 201 of Villa Rosa Sasazuka.

※

Ente Isla and Earth, the source of the chaos which spanned across these two

worlds, and also considered the main criminal who was pulling strings in the background, archangel Lailah.

The birth mother of Hero Emilia Justina, a.k.a. Yusa Emi, finally appeared before Maou and the rest.

Lailah, who was in contact with Shiba Miki since sixteen years ago, was thought to have a lot of information related to Alas=Ramus, Acies=Ara, and Iron, the children born from the Sephirah.

The two children born from the 'Yesod' Sephirah were already considered irreplaceable important existences to Maou. From the point of view of Maou, Emi, and the others, Lailah showing up was as if the important information required to survive had appeared in a personified form.

However, having to face the various tragedies and chaos caused by Lailah on her own, Emi was unable to accept the gap between the casual, non-malicious attitude and actions of this lady who seemed to be her 'mother', therefore choosing to reject Lailah.

Maou, who had planned to query a variety information from Lailah at the beginning, gradually shifted to a tough attitude during the conversation and rejected her in the end as well.

The two people who had continuously fought on the stage on the Earth's surface, and the one person who had run around in Earth's backstage; ever since their parting, forgot about being in parallel, the distance between them simply grew wider and wider.

After a few days passed like this, the underground metro which Emi and Chiho rode on was attacked by someone.

The attacker was a pitch-black shadow, the other party allowed Emi's holy sword to pass through it, did not regard the descendant of the Earth's Sephirah, Ooguro Amane, as a threat, and even caused Lailah to get seriously hurt at the end of the battle.

Lailah knew the true identity of the shadow, and after knowing the incident of the underground metro attack was also one of the troubles caused by Lailah's plans, Maou and Emi's attitude towards her only became tougher.

The common thought between the two of them was that they no longer wanted to be manipulated by others.

Especially since their common workplace, the MgRonalds in front of Hatagaya station had a new business, the MgRonalds Happy Delivery which had officially started after a long period of preparation, for the Demon King and Hero from a foreign world, they were already spending all of their effort in maintaining their lives.

However, the ones who had requested the two of them to negotiate with Lailah in a half forceful manner were Shiba Miki and Ooguro Amane.

Shiba and Amane had captured the pitch-black shadow which had attacked the underground metro and injured Lailah. Therefore, Maou and Emi were forced to face the true identity of the black shadow, which would be the fact that it was the young boy Iron who was born from the 'Geburah' Sephirah of Ente Isla.

Anomalies had occurred within Iron's body, and this was related to the secrets Lailah harboured. According to Lailah's explanation, if her problems continued to be put aside, this might affect Maou and Emi's 'daughter' Alas=Ramus and her younger sister Acies=Ara in the future.

Even so, without caring that he was in the presence of Emi, who was conversing with Lailah, Maou had an agreement with Lailah that he would negotiate with her in Room 201 of Villa Rosa if Chiho, Ashiya, or Urushihara were present. Under Maou's provocation, Emi had also agreed to negotiate with Lailah.

The anomalies which had occurred within Iron's body would not immediately happen to Alas=Ramus or Acies, but including the 'crisis to the humans of Ente Isla' which Shiba had mentioned in Urushihara's hospital room, a sense of uneasiness of not knowing how dangerous it would be and when it would occur spanned across Maou and Emi, as well as the distant future which they had set their sights on.

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Perhaps it was the effect of the uneasiness she felt within her heart, from Chiho's point of view, the Villa Rosa Sasazuka which she had visited countless

times seemed to have turned into a different building.

The lights in the windows which gave her the feeling that some familiar faces would be waiting for her and giving her a sense of assurance seemed strangely cold today.

She would normally hear Ashiya, Suzuno, and Urushihara arguing once she stepped on the public stairs, but it was completely quiet today.

As if the area was empty, the area in front of the common corridor was silent, and the presence of Suzuno and Alas=Ramus could not be felt at all.

Chiho was even drawn into an illusion that everyone she cherished had abandoned her and disappeared, causing her to press the doorbell of Room 201 in an anxious manner.

“Is it Chi-chan? The door isn’t locked. Come in.”

Chiho could not help but let out the breath she had been holding in.

The tone was stiff, but it was definitely Maou’s voice. While she was a little depressed at herself for having these baseless uneasy feelings, after remembering the responsibilities she had to fulfill next, Chiho made up her mind and opened the door—

“Sorry for disturbing.....”

—and froze on the spot.

“.....H-hello, Chiho-san.....”

“Oh, Chi-chan. Thanks for coming here after work.”

“Hurry up and close the door, it’s cold.”

This was not a figure of speech, it was extremely cold within the room.

No draft seeped in from the cracks, but the indoor temperature of Room 201 felt two to three degrees lower than outside.

And the three figures waiting for Chiho inside the room also clearly reflected this fact.

Maou, as the master of the house, wore a woollen cap on his head, had his UNIXLO Ultralight Down jacket zipped all the way up, and seemed to have worn

two layers of socks on his feet.

From the thickness of his shoulders and the unnatural overlapping of the back of his head, Urushihara, who was sitting at the computer table with his back facing the porch, was obviously wearing a few layers of clothes, and he even had a woollen blanket covering his legs.

The only one who could be considered normally dressed was Lailah, she was only wearing a thicker one piece dress, and did not use any other measures to protect herself against the cold. In addition, Lailah's hair, which had turned purple from the attack on the underground metro a while ago, only caused her complexion to look 20% worse compared to normal.

Because it was really too cold indoors, Chiho even suspected that the demonic magic which Maou stuffed into the closet might have leaked out, but even when she had not activated her holy magic, she did not observe any changes to her health.

In other words, it was simply because it was very cold inside the room.

"See, it's just like I said. Chi-chan will definitely not go wrong at important moments, she will always think about the next two or three steps beforehand and meticulously make preparations. You should learn more from her."

Maou suddenly praised Chiho randomly, deepening her confusion even further.

"B-but who would be able to predict this kind of situation. Wasn't this room repaired a few times? Why is it colder than outside?"

Lailah's protest was also Chiho's question. In response to this, the answer of the master of the house was very simple.

"Because this is the kind of apartment it is."

".....Ugh!"

Faced with the calm declaration from the King of Demons, the archangel could only become speechless.

"Sasaki Chiho, close the door properly."

"Ah, al-alright, sorry."

Urushihara turned back and shouted in a slightly harsher tone, Chiho frantically walked into the room and closed the door.

The door was closed, but the internal temperature did not raise. However, Urushihara left it at that.

“.....Did Chiho-san know?”

“K-know what?”

“That this room..... is this cold.....”

“Eh..... uh.....”

Chiho thought about Lailah’s question a bit, then recalled her attire.

The earmuffs and scarf which she liked. Wearing a wool top underneath the thick down jacket, and leggings with very good insulating effect beneath her jeans.

According to the weather forecast, the lowest temperature today was five degrees, and as the highest temperature was fourteen degrees, Chiho still sweated a little when she was walking to work, but currently, it was just right.

“I-I didn’t know. But once I thought that I would be coming here tonight, I naturally dressed this way.”

“Naturally?”

Compared to Lailah’s look of surprise, Maou nodded in satisfaction.

“Because Chi-chan knows that our home does not have any heating facilities. I knew that the detail oriented Chi-chan would definitely prepare to this standard.”

““Is this something to feel proud about?””

Urushihara, who lived in this room, could not help but stand on Lailah’s side.

“Sasaki Chiho, you shouldn’t spoil Maou too much!”

“Uh, no, I have never thought so.....”

“Because you’re always siding with Maou, even Ashiya is happily saying that there’s no need for heating! Look at this!”

After saying this, Urushihara took out a heavy looking bag from next to his feet.

“A hot water bag! He even said that because he bought this, he would only take out the kotatsu during New Year’s!”

“W-what’s wrong with a hot water bag?! I use one when I sleep at night too.....”

“That’s when you sleep, right?! Would you normally hug a hot water bag when you’re at home during the day?”

“I won’t.”

“Urushihara, be nicer with your words. Chi-chan isn’t wrong. A hot water bag is a good thing.”

“This isn’t a problem of whether the hot water bag is good or not! If they knew that Maou had said such a thing, those from the Demon Army who have died during the invasion of Ente Isla and are in the other world would cry until they turn dry.”

“Noisy. Buying air conditioning or heaters will cause my bank account to dry up.”

“What do you think demonic magic is used forrrr?!”

When thinking that it would be natural for Urushihara to say such a thing, after Chiho realised that Maou and Urushihara were unexpectedly acting like normal, she finally relaxed a little.

Next, as if Chiho’s change in mood was sensed—

“Chiho! Is Chiho here?!”

The noisy sounds of the door being knocked and a voice were heard.

“Acies-chan? Ehm, Maou-san.....”

“Maou! You didn’t want my nose to pick up Chiho’s scent, but as long as wholesalers use a grater, it won’t be so easy!”^[2]

“What is she saying.....”

“We’re hungry! Since Chiho is here, there should be karaage in the room,

right?!"

"I-I just came over from my workplace, so I didn't bring anything today."

Feeling troubled, Maou reassured Chiho who had become restless when faced with Acies's overly honest desires.

"Ah~ it's alright, Chi-chan, there's no need to be bothered by it. This is expected after all."

"Eh? There's none? Well, that's too bad."

However, the one who complained at this time was unexpectedly Urushihara.

"Recently, for Acies and Iron to learn how to watch their health, Ashiya and Bell had decreased the quantity of the side dishes, so I was quite looking forward to Sasaki Chiho bringing karaage over."

"Urushihara, only you are able to view Chi-chan's kindness as food in such a direct manner."

"E-erhm, sorry, I'll bring them over next time."

"Chi-chan doesn't have to be bothered by it at all, there's no need to act in such a reserved manner. Ever since he was discharged from hospital, he's become really thick skinned."

"Thick skinned? When I was in hospital and after I was discharged, no one was worried about my health at all. Everyone was just worried about Ashiya's or Emi's friend. Wishing for another side dish at this time shouldn't be too much of a request, right?"

"You can't be serious about what you just said, right?"

From Maou's point of view, although Urushihara did get admitted to hospital, his body did not undergo any changes which warranted any concern from the others.

"Shouldn't I be the one asking you if you're serious about what you said? Because until the end, Amane-san and the Landlady never told you why I was admitted to hospital, right?"

"They only said that the Landlady's mysterious power..... caused a negative

effect on your body.”

When Urushihara was admitted to hospital before, other than Shiba’s relatives, Chiho was the only person present at the scene.

When asking Amane about the secrets regarding the Sephirah of Earth, Chiho had hinted for Urushihara to eavesdrop, but when Amane was about to reveal information, the Landlady returned.

Urushihara was sent to the hospital in an unconscious state.

Before that, when Archangel Kamael attacked the school Chiho was studying at, Urushihara had been injured protecting Chiho and Suzuno, if he had ended up in hospital because of these injuries, there was still reason to show understanding and concern towards him, but to simply have seen the Landlady Shiba Miki, there was nothing to feel concerned about.

“Currently, once I go near the Landlady, my hair colour will lighten you know? This is definitely strange, right?!”

“You have a lot of hair and it is annoying to look at, so decreasing its amount is just right.”

“Who told you that the amount of my hair had decreased? I’m talking about colour, colour!”

“Sigh, you’re noisy. But talking about hair colour growing lighter. Lailah, have you encountered such a situation before?”

“No. Ever since I was healed by you, my hair had always been like this. While I have met with Shiba-san, no notable changes have occurred.”

The change in the colour of Lailah’s hair was the opposite of Urushihara. Her original hair colour was silver, but after having her wounds healed by Maou with demonic magic, the colour of her hair turned purple like Urushihara’s.

“Not considering physical appearance, my body did not malfunction in any way.”

“Urushihara’s health condition did not become worse, it’s only hair colour, so stop complaining already. You don’t go out anyway, so there won’t be any problems if you stay away from the Landlady, right? Since there aren’t any after

effects from the injuries obtained from fighting Kamael, there isn't any reason to complain."

"That's true."

Although Urushihara still had an unsatisfied expression on his face—

"I heard all of you talking about side dishes! Just give up already and open the door!"

—the big eater who was noisier than Urushihara started to make a lot of noise in the corridor once she heard food related terms.

Having no other choice, Maou got to his feet and as if to take Chiho's place after inviting her indoors, he walked to the front porch and opened the door.

"Hello, Chihowah!"

At this instant, Acies, whose appetite was fully awakened by converting for Chiho's non-existent dishes, suddenly transformed into purple orbs and was sucked within Maou's body.

"Go back to the doghouse."

This crude method of sealing Acies could only be done by Maou, who was merged with Acies.

"Ah~ so noisy. I will let you out when we're done talking, settle down already. In addition, Chi-chan just got off work today and is very tired, don't cause more trouble for her!"

Acies must have been protesting with all her might within Maou's head, perhaps it was useless even if he covered his ears, Maou responded with a frown.

"Eh? Where's Acies?"

However, Acies was not the only one in the corridor.

The one who peeked indoors in a more low key manner was Iron, who looked a little healthier compared to before and was wearing Japanese clothes which Nord and Lailah had bought for him, such that he looked no different from a normal young boy.

Thinking about it, Acies did use the term ‘we’ before the door was opened.

Iron, who had calmed down from the ‘loss of control’ described by Lailah and Amane, was recently spending most of his time with Acies and causing trouble for Nord, Lailah, and Amane every single time, most likely because Nord, Lailah, and Amane were forced to spend more than expected because of Acies’ and Iron’s huge appetites. However, the noses of both these Sephirah children seemed to be especially sensitive today.

They probably smelled either Chiho’s scent or the MgRonalds smell on Chiho, and came over because they had predicted that someone brought food over.

“Don’t just go along with Acies all the time. If you follow behind her, you will eventually encounter something which is considered embarrassing or shameful.”

Maou pointed at his own head and advised Iron, then frowned again as if he thought it was noisy.

Even if Chiho could not hear it with her ears, she could still clearly imagine the scene of Acies shouting ‘Don’t say something so rude’.

“I want to stay by her side as much as possible.”

Unexpectedly, the young boy said this.

“We have been scattered in various lands the whole time. To be able to eat together like this every day, even now, I still find it difficult to believe. These few days feel like a dream.”

“Until now, I still cannot believe how much both of you can eat every day, the food expenses aren’t a dream as well, such a cold reality.”

“Ahaha..... haha.”

Chiho, who clearly knew the size of Acies’s and Iron’s appetites, could only smile wryly.

However, after noticing one thing, Chiho’s smile gradually disappeared.

Acies and Iron had shown unbelievable appetites, but their body shape had not changed at all.

However, having crossed swords with Maou and the others before and was now their rival in burgers and chicken, the shop manager of the Sentucky in front of Hatagaya station—Mitsuki Sarue, a.k.a. Archangel Sariel, after being infatuated with Kisaki and eating huge amounts of MgRonalds meals every day, it caused him to become shockingly fat in a very short amount of time.

Just from the reaction of eating a lot of food, between Sariel and Acies, it was obvious which side was more normal. However, even when talking about a huge amount, the amount Sariel ate was still lesser than Acies and Iron.

Only Acies and Iron displayed such crazy appetites, could there be another reason behind this other than being gluttons?

Just as Chiho wanted to suppress the uneasiness which rose within her, what Iron said next pushed her into the sea of uneasiness once more.

“But if this is not a dream but reality, then this place is not where we belong.”

“.....Ugh.”

Whether the one who sucked in a breath was Chiho or Maou, perhaps neither of them knew this.

“Whether it is me, Acies, or Alas=Ramus, we all have a place we need to return to. Everyone is waiting for us to return. However, if our sense of self is lost like what happened with me earlier, I might be unable to return next time.”

“Stop.”

Maou’s tone suddenly became stern, Iron continued to speak without being bothered by it.

“I have many people I want to meet. I hope that all of you can help me.”

“Didn’t I tell you to stop already?”

“.....Iron, please, control yourself.”

It was only when Lailah sensed that Maou was exuding a dangerous aura and used a low and sharp voice to stop Iron did he finally drop the subject.

“I understand. Sorry.”

Iron apologised honestly, and after bowing his head towards Maou, he turned

to Chiho who had a stiff expression on her face, lowered his head again and said, "I have to apologise to Chiho too. I am always scaring Chiho."

"Eh..... ah."

Chiho did not feel fear because of Iron. But the young boy born from the Sephirah seemed to have sensed what the completely different fear swirling in Chiho's heart was.

"Whether it was the first time we met, or what happened earlier, it was like this. Although I have to protect people like Chiho."

"Protect, people like me?"

"It won't be enough no matter how many times I apologise to Chiho, but Chiho would always make delicious food for me. Treating me kindly. I..... still had planned to take away things which are important to Chiho. I really don't know what I should do anymore."

"Iron.....?"

"Hey, know your limits already....."

"Ah! So you were here after all!"

At this moment, Nord's frantic voice could be heard from the public staircase.

"I'm sorry, my attention slipped a bit and they took the chance to run out."

Nord, who had been lectured a lot by Maou recently, now looked like a father who was troubled over how to interact with his neighbours, he spoke after surveying his surroundings, "Is Acies merged with you?"

".....Come out."

"Owah!"

Acies appeared in the air like she was spat out unhappily by Maou and fell on the tatami just like that, but without giving up, she still stood up, ignored Maou and spoke to Chiho, "Chiho, it would be better for you to reconsider."

"Eh? Con, consider what?"

"Maou, of course! Liking this kind of guy will definitely hurt you! Marrying Maou would definitely be a very difficult experience!"

The term ‘marriage’ appearing so suddenly caused Chiho who was already harbouring an unexplainable tension to reach a limit break for her thoughts.

“A-A-A-A-A-A-Acies-chan! W-what? What are you saying so suddenly?”

“It’s just like what I said! Chiho saw it just now too, right?! Once Maou encounters a situation which is disadvantageous to him, he will forcefully merge with me! In the future, he will definitely become someone who can only say eat, bath, sleep and be a useless, self-centred, male chauvinistic husbandowwwww!”

As Acies started spouting Showa era style terms which she had learned from unknown sources, the moment Chiho’s thoughts began to swirl around, a dull noise caused Acies to produce a scream which did not sound like it should come from a mysterious personification of a Sephirah.

“It feels like that blow just now was very painful.”

“W-wait, Satan, Acies is a girl, so please be gentler to her.....”

Maou’s magnificent iron fist punishment caused Urushihara and Lailah, who were quietly watching thus far, to react.

“To make disobedient brats listen and be quiet, I only know this method.”

Maou grabbed Acies’s head and neck directly, forcefully took her out of Room 201, handed her to Nord, then closed the door with force.

Although Maou said that he had already made Acies quiet down, Acies’s complaints, curses, and the fact that she was hungry could still be heard from the corridor outside. Maou ignored all of this completely, put in the door chain, and then sighed like he truly felt tired from the bottom of his heart.

“.....Sorry, Chi-chan.”

“Y-yes?”

“Erhm..... don’t take what Iron and Acies said to heart.”

“Eh, ah, al, alright.”

Her thoughts racing, Chiho nodded on reflex. When she saw Maou sit on the tatami once again like he was going to face Lailah, Chiho finally remembered

the reason she came to this room, she unzipped her down jacket and sat down as well.

Therefore, after Chiho calmed down, she was still unable to ask the question which was trivial yet possessed difficult characteristics that had surfaced in her mind.

Because in this setting, it was a meaningless question, it was a very personal question.

Chiho knew why she was called here.

That would be to witness the negotiations between the Demon King and an Archangel which seemed to be related to the fates of the humans of Ente Isla.

To be appointed as a witness by one of the parties, and that this party was Maou whom she admired, Chiho considered this something to feel happy about.

This was a great opportunity to be able to stay at Maou's side, to be of help to Maou, and be a source of support to Maou.

Therefore, Chiho subconsciously swallowed that sentence, and sealed her own complicated thoughts.

When Maou asked her to not take what Iron and Acies said to heart, which parts was he referring to?

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Chiho was chosen as the witness for the negotiations between Maou and Lailah, but she did not clearly know what the two were going to talk about.

From what had happened within Urushihara's hospital room, Lailah probably wanted to borrow Maou's and Emi's power to break through the trouble the Ente Isla Sephirah were facing.

All of Lailah's past actions could probably be traced back to this purpose. In other words, gathering all the facts which Chiho knew, whether it was the

young Maou becoming Demon King Satan or Emi becoming Maou's enemy with her identity of Hero Emilia, it was a situation Lailah had created.

Maou had the 'Yesod' fragment which was the original form of Alas=Ramus. Emi also had 'Yesod' fragments which made up the Evolving Holy Sword, One Wing (Better Half). Lailah and the Landlady of Villa Rosa Shiba Miki, who had close relations to the Earth Sephirah, were concerned about the future of the 'humans of Ente Isla', but the conflict between Maou and Emi jeopardised these humans greatly.

In addition, although Chiho was not from Ente Isla, she also owned a fragment of 'Yesod' from Ente Isla.

So as not to lose the ring which had the fragment embedded on it, Chiho bought an accessory box which could be locked, put the ring inside, and carried it around with her.

Chiho's status as a high school student meant that she could not boldly wear a ring with an embedded jewel, and during work, it was naturally forbidden to wear any kind of accessories, so Chiho did not wear the ring on her hand that much in the first place.

Although possessing a fragment meant that she would be targeted by the angels from Heaven and faced with life threatening dangers, around Chiho were Maou and Emi, who were so strong that they did not see the angels as any kind of threat, and powerful existences like Amane and Shiba were around to protect her.

More importantly, considering the circumstances in which Chiho had obtained this ring, and the person who had entrusted this ring to Chiho, the fact that Lailah and Gabriel, who were both living in Japan, did not reclaim the ring, there must be a certain significance to this.

The core of the huge mystery which Chiho encountered always included the fragments of the 'Yesod' Sephirah.

The mystery might be unravelled today.

"Anyway, I wanted Chiho-san to take a look at this."

"Ah, yes. Eh? This is, eh?"

Chiho, who remembered many things which had occurred so far with a stern expression on her face, accepted the item which was passed to her from the side on reflex, and after confirming what it was, her eyes widened.

It was a normal folder.

After naturally accepting the folder with a blue cover which could be found at every convenience store or stationary store, Chiho opened the folder and as she had discovered something strange, she looked between Lailah's and Maou's faces in turn.

No matter what, this was too strange, right?

"Uh..... The World Crisis..... eh?"

This folder from a 100 yen store—A4 size, with 12 pockets—was there really a world, no, planetary crisis contained within?

After opening the folder, contained within the first pocket of the folder was an information cover which was only slightly better designed than a flyer for a cultural class conducted by the Modern Civic Centre.

Written in cursive with a three-dimensional effect was the title 'Regarding the Crisis Facing the Humans of Ente Isla Deduced from the Interference to the Tree of Life', a multi-coloured gradient was even added into the white spaces. All of this was printed on an area close to the center of the A4 paper.

".....Lailah-san."

"For convenience of reading, I thought of many kinds of typesetting."

Seeing Lailah show a pleased expression, Chiho sighed.

This was a crisis.

And since it was a human crisis, this problem should affect many human lives.

Using this kind of rainbow colour was too inappropriate.



“This kind of text digital art, or text design, what was it called again?”

“Text special effects. And it’s a very old version,” Urushihara answered.

“My computer does not have a software that can use this, so I am not sure about this, but at least current versions should not be able to use that kind of design easily.”

“Ah, I remember when I was in elementary school, the teacher had taught us about this with the large computer in the Audio-Visual Classroom.....”

“It, it was still the newest model at that time!”

As Urushihara and Chiho, who reaped the benefits of modern digital civilisation, had very bland reactions, the originally pleased Lailah became embarrassed and tried to justify herself as she blushed.

Then after a series of conversations, Chiho confirmed that the ‘the Mother of the Hero from a Foreign World’ who called herself an ‘Archangel’, used her own computer to create this information.

“Although it was not as easy to buy and not as cheap as it is currently, I still worked hard at that time and bought one! I also worked seriously to save money for the family.”

“Lailah came to Japan seventeen years ago, right? The C drives for desktop computers at that time should have only been 2GB or 4GB?”

“No matter what, I can’t continue using something from seventeen years ago! I bought a new one ten years ago, so the hard drive space is 60GB, and the commercial software is the newest at that time! Other than that, I still had other opportunities to use computers on a regular basis!”

Lailah rebuked this, but everyone wished that she did not rebuke about this kind of thing, and in the field of computers, the newest model ten years ago would already be an antique which could not be found anymore in present times.

“This laptop seemed to be an old model which Maou had bought in what seemed like a scam, but the C drive also has 80GB of space. The operating

system from ten years ago would also not be updated anymore. That laptop is dangerous.”

“It’s fine! I don’t connect to the internet anyway!”

Chiho had experienced Lailah’s great power before, so until now, she was unable to see Lailah as an existence close to her like how she saw Maou or Urushihara.

But seeing an archangel and fallen angel debating about their own computing facilities with such pathetic standards, she felt that it was a little amusing.

With things as they were now, this scene was nothing to feel shocked about.

“A computer from ten years ago which cannot connect to the internet, what kind of worth does it have?”

“If you just want to go to the internet, then using a Slimphone would be easier, right?!”

When Chiho saw Lailah take out a Slimphone from her bag which she placed in the corner of the room, she confirmed one thing.

“As expected of family.”

“Eh? Chiho-san, what did you say?”

“Ah, no, nothing.....”

Chiho frantically covered up what she said accidentally.

The distance between Lailah and Emi seemed to have shortened a little after the attack on the underground metro, but Emi was still mentally unprepared to face her mother, and Lailah did not know how to interact with her daughter, so the two of them could not even talk to each other properly, let alone reconcile with one another.

If the two of them were known as ‘family’ in this situation, Lailah would probably feel happy, but Emi would definitely think it was repulsive.

“How should I put it, it feels as if Lailah is no different from a normal human.”

“Oh my, on a personal level, this thought should be considered something to feel happy about. I don’t want to be some angel, in fact I keep wishing to be a

more relatable existence.”

Lailah interpreted Chiho’s words in a more positive manner, but Urushihara commented as if he was throwing cold water on this, “What Sasaki Chiho said just now also contained the meaning ‘This person is different from what I originally thought’, the fact that you feel honestly happy about this is also a bit strange.”

“Urushihara-san!”

Chiho could not help but protest.

“I’m correct, right? You basically do not fear angels or demons, and have said things like ‘Is this person really an angel’ to me and Sariel so easily.”

“Uh, I didn’t say that..... I-I might have said it occasionally.”

“It might be that way.”

“Even Maou-san says so?”

It was fine if only Urushihara said this, but for Maou to say so as well, Chiho could not help but feel shocked about this.

Did she actually show a mocking or sarcastic attitude, but just did not notice it?

Chiho felt depressed about this, but what Maou wanted to express was a little different from what Urushihara wanted to express.

“Uh, how should I say this, because Chi-chan’s emotions or mental state are much stronger than normal humans, demons of our standard or angels at the standard of Sariel and Gabriel are still unable to evoke any feelings of awe and veneration in Chi-chan.”

“E-erhm, not considering those angels, I respect Maou-san and the rest, okay.”

Her thoughts were chaotic, but Chiho still clearly excluded the angels. This caused Maou, who was showing a stern expression in front of Lailah, to laugh.

“Although I feel happy that you said this, in the end, Chi-chan should just remain as how you are right now.”

“Ahwahwahwahwahwahwahwahwah.....”

Chiho seemed to have understood, yet not what Maou wanted to express. She frantically wanted to get up, but Lailah kindly pressed down on her shoulder and held her back.

“It’s fine, it’s fine.”

“Wha-wha-wha-wha-what is fine?”

“I know Chiho-san does not have bad intentions, if you don’t mind, can I ask you to take a look at this?”

“This? Ah, right, there’s still this.....”

Although they went off topic because of an unnecessary comment from Urushihara, the beginning of this was the fact that Lailah had prepared materials which did not seem like it was done by an angel.

Anyway, although the title did not give others a feeling that it was a world crisis, Chiho still made up her mind and flipped to the first page.

※

In the past, the Earth had a Tree of Life (Sephiroth), and the Sephirah which were born from the Tree of Life.

And Ente Isla also had a similar Tree of Life and Sephirah.

The Tree of Life, like what its name represented, was a huge tree, and the Sephirah could be considered as the fruit produced by the tree.

Currently, it could not be determined if the Tree of Life on Earth and Ente Isla were similar existences.

The Tree of Life would only appear on planets where vertebrate animals breathe oxygen as a source of energy and where anthropoids were already born.

Then it would plant itself on a satellite body or a corresponding celestial body which was the closest to the core planet and would influence it the most, and choose the ‘civilised humans’ from the anthropoids on the planet to cultivate them.

The Tree of Life would not choose humans, the method it used was basically helping the evolution of the species which was confirmed to rule the world within the history of evolution and elimination.

In the past, homo species whose genes were unrelated to the modern human also existed on Earth, the Tree of Life did not eliminate them from its consideration. If they could become more prosperous than the ancestors of the modern human on this planet, then they would be determined to be 'civilised humans' by the Tree of Life.

Then what kind of existence was a 'tree which can cultivate civilised humans'?

Unfortunately, whether it was Lailah or Heaven, they were unable to discern its true nature.

There was only one fact, which was a phenomenon observed by Heaven in the past.

At a certain time, the Tree of Life would produce 'the last Sephirah', then leave the planet it had planted itself on based on biological intents to disappear into the universe.

This was the reason it could not be confirmed whether the Tree of Life on Earth and Ente Isla was the same one.

Until now, Lailah had confirmed the signs of three Trees of Life. However, the only one whose existence could be confirmed was the Ente Isla Tree of Life.

Anyway, after the Tree of Life chose the humans who should be evolved, it would produce the 'children' who would help the humans.

Those would be the ten Sephirah born from the Tree of Life.

'Kether' of Thought and Creation, 'Chochmah' of Wisdom, 'Binah' of Understanding, 'Chesed' of Mercy, 'Geburah' of Austerity, 'Tiphareth' of Beauty, 'Netzach' of Victory, 'Hod' of Glory, 'Yesod' of Foundation and Spirit, and 'Malkuth' of Realm and Matter.

The mission of the Sephirah was to provide assistance when humans were facing a 'crisis' to prevent humans from going extinct.

Thought, Creation, Wisdom, Understanding, and Beauty, helped humans to

discover ways to protect themselves during pandemics, disasters, and conflicts; Victory and Glory caused competition to help humans advance civilisation; Austerity and Mercy caused war born from competition, or helped people resolve conflicts; Foundation and Spirit, as well as Realm and Matter, helped humans individually and collectively to adjust to an ideal state.

Sephirah were definitely not the guardians of humans, and would not interfere in human history.

However, no matter what the method was, as long as human civilisation was unable to avoid the danger when it was facing a crisis, the Sephirah would use their power so that humans could continue on.

But in Ente Isla, whether it was the Tree of Life or the Sephirah, this function had been sealed up.

That was because the angels of Heaven had suppressed the Ente Isla Tree of Life and monopolised all the Sephirah.

Because Heaven had interfered with the connection between the Ente Isla humans and the Sephirah, to the humans of Ente Isla, the angels of Heaven were ‘Heaven’s Ambassadors’ who could cause miracles.

Because of that, it brought about many negative effects.

Firstly, as a whole, this greatly slowed down the technological advancement of the Ente Isla humans.

Then the Ente Isla humans discovered ‘resources’ called holy magic and demonic magic.

Basically, the humans who were born in the environment of the planet which the Tree of Life had planted itself would all have very limited special characteristics, and would all be similar.

Therefore, if the Ente Isla humans evolved normally, although there would be some differences in standard, they should develop medical technologies to heal humans, weapons industries for war, and scientific technology to make life more convenient like in the history of Earth.

However, the interference of the angels caused the Ente Isla humans to miss

the opportunity to discover or create these technologies.

The angels used the power which they already possessed to directly solve the crisis faced by the humans.

And after seeing that power, the humans of Ente Isla no longer pursued innovative technologies which could bring about the continuous improvement of humans, but started to value the miraculous powers used by Heaven's ambassadors.

In other words, it would be the spells which were displayed after treating holy magic as a source of energy.

In the same era humans discovered holy magic, the angels started to decrease the number of times they came to Ente Isla.

Just from this, the angels were divinised and brought about the religious foundation of the modern Theocracy. After that, the Ente Isla humans chose the path of analysing the true nature of holy magic while using spells to develop civilisation.

However, a few serious problems occurred at this time.

Firstly, the simple fact was that whether it was Heaven or angels, unlike the Sephirah, they lacked the natural will to protect humans.

As a system built to cultivate humans—the Tree of Life and Sephirah would definitely not miss out any fatal crisis which might cause the extinction of humans.

Although this was also a fact Heaven obtained after accumulating their observations, then angels would definitely not carry out missions on behalf of the Tree of Life and the Sephirah.

Just by observing what has happened so far, it was obvious that in terms of physical and mental states, the actions of the angels were inconsistent with the Sephirah, so from the Sephirah's point of view, the fact that the Ente Isla humans had not faced extinction was already considered a miracle.

And the biggest problem was that holy magic was definitely not an infinite resource.

The Tree of Life had the function to ‘cultivate civilised humans’, but as long as the Tree of Life and Sephirah were organic entities, they still needed to absorb some energy to survive.

The energy needed by the Tree of Life was ‘human spiritual energy’.

Just like crops which can produce fruit, growing rapidly as long as they have a little water and nutrition, from the fact that they need what each other produced in order to survive, the Tree of Life and humans had a symbiotic relationship.

However, the amount of holy magic was depleting at an alarming rate across the whole of Ente Isla.

Since it was a civilisation which developed with holy magic as its foundation, the amount of holy magic being used greatly exceeded the amount of energy needed by the Tree of Life.

“Converting spiritual energy to power.....”

Chiho, who had remembered something due to this record, could not help but suck in a breath.

Chiho knew that the demonic magic used by Maou and the others came from fear and despairing spiritual energies, so she could not ignore this fact.

If she believed this theory, then not just Emi and Suzuno, even the holy magic within Chiho, was the spiritual power of the humans living in Ente Isla.

The after effect of intentionally compressing these things and using them as power was recorded in the next page.

Predictably, if holy magic continued to be used in large amounts, it would cause the Tree of Life to wither and the death of the Sephirah in the end.

If the key element to avoid crises was lost, Ente Isla humans would definitely degenerate in the near future.

Other than losing the key parties, the Sephirah, who could respond to crises, greatly consuming holy magic as an energy source for spells would cause the total amount of holy magic to decrease past the minimum levels. Eventually, there would be no way to use spells.

On that day, it would be equivalent to the Ente Isla humans losing civilisation.

Even for people with larger holy magic capacities like Emerada, Alberto, or Olba, they would eventually use up the energy within their bodies and become normal people.

At that time, the Ente Isla humans, who had not developed technological skills, would be unable to save themselves when they encountered a crisis.

The energy known as holy magic, originally came from humans' spiritual energy, therefore the negative effects of overusing holy magic were not limited to these.

According to the results of Lailah's predictions, in the whole of Ente Isla consisting of the five continents arranged in a holy cross, there has been a trend of decreasing birth rates over the past few hundred years.

Lailah pointed out the possibility that overconsuming holy magic might hamper the birth of new humans.

The reason why Shiba said that the Ente Isla humans would face a crisis only after a few hundred years was mainly due to this fact.

However, Ente Isla still had not developed a culture of analysing statistics on a global level.

Even the Five Continent Knight Alliance formed due to the invasion of the Demon King Army was unable to show this kind of efficiency.

Rather than that, in order to recover from the disaster brought about by the Demon King Army, and to pursue further development, it was not difficult to imagine that spell civilisation would only become more prosperous.

Therefore, Lailah strongly believed that they needed to free all the Sephirah,

starting from now.

They could not salvage what had happened in the past.

However, if they wanted to return the Tree of Life and the Sephirah back to their rightful state, even if they had to make huge sacrifices, there might still be a chance to rescue the Ente Isla humans and steer them away from this dangerous situation.

But, if they wanted to move towards that kind of future, Heaven and the angels who live there would definitely be huge obstacle.

By monopolising the Sephirah, the angels gained many benefits.

Although this had something to do with the angels' very long lifespan and their strong power, with regards to this part, it had to be confirmed if Maou and Emi were willing to help after knowing Lailah's purpose before it could be determined if the two of them could be told about this or not.

Lailah's purpose was to free the Tree of Life and the Sephirah from Heaven's control, witness the birth of 'the last Sephirah', and save the future of the Ente Isla humans.

For this, they would have to be prepared to fight many battles.

Because many angels from Heaven would be made their enemies in this process, Lailah had spent a very long period of time to search for existences which could fight against that power.

※

".....I understand everything now."

"What do you think?"

Hearing Lailah's voice which was filled with anticipation, Chiho hesitated, wondering how to reply.

Anyway, she did not doubt the authenticity of the contents.

Many things within were closely related to the things she had heard directly from Amane and Shiba in the past, and if she compared it with what she had heard, seen, and experienced, there were many areas which were acceptable.

However, because it was so.

Since this was Ente Isla's crisis, it should be concluded that this folder concerned the lives of many Ente Isla humans.

However, this report lacked that kind of tension.

Chiho could roughly understand the fear Lailah harboured, and the problems which would befall Ente Isla in the future.

However, for unknown reasons, she felt that this had nothing to do with her.

Chiho felt a little dizzy, it felt like she had just finished a children's illustration book which was translated from a legend spread around overseas.

From how schematic diagrams, graphics, and tables were used in the report, Lailah probably had wanted to arrange the information such that it was easy to understand.

But this was not the main point.

What Chiho really wanted to see was not these things, and Maou was probably the same as well.

Although this information was also important, Maou and Chiho were unable to make any judgements, and this was useless on an emotional standpoint.

"Can I ask you a rather strange question?"

"....."

Chiho did not face Lailah, but sought permission from Maou, and Maou agreed with a glance.

"Please, ask anything you want!"

Like what Lailah expressed, she turned towards Chiho with an attitude of ask any question you want.

"Then....."

Chiho cleared her throat slightly, then faced Lailah directly.

"Lailah-san."

"Yes."

“May I know what is your current job in Japan?”

“.....Eh?”

Chiho asked a question which everyone present did not expect.

Lailah’s reaction at that moment, was like a fourth batter who, after walking valiantly to the batter’s zone, was intentionally given a Base on Balls by the ace pitcher.^[3]

“Uh..... my job?”

“Yes.”

“.....Why?” Lailah asked Chiho in return while maintaining a stiff smile.

“Eh, because you said that I can ask anything.”

“I-I did say such a thing..... but, why?”

“It feels like your personality is turning strange, you know?”

Lailah was obviously shaken such that she did not even hear Maou’s comment.

“Uh, after reading this report, I suddenly felt very curious about it.”

Feeling surprised, Lailah looked at Chiho, Maou, and the back of Urushihara’s head in turn, then moved her gaze back to Chiho.

“Erhm, I’m sorry, although this seems like I’m using a question to answer your question.”

“Please go ahead.”

“Are there some things which are difficult to understand? Or did I write something which caused you to be curious about my job or life.....”

“No,” Chiho replied succinctly, “because nothing which would make someone feel curious about Lailah-san’s life was written about at all, that was why I am bothered by it.”

“Uh.....”

Unlike Lailah who still did not understand the meaning behind Chiho’s words, Maou said with a wry smile, “Chi-chan is really kind. I had planned not to tell

her about this at all unless she noticed the problem herself.”

“Ah! Is, is this no good?”

Chiho became flustered when she remembered that Maou was originally reluctant to hear Lailah out. With a wry smile, Maou shook his head.

“No, if no one reminded her, it would probably have been impossible for her to discover it anytime soon, so this is good.”

After Maou said this, in front of Lailah who looked very lost, he took out a piece of paper and a namecard box which Chiho had never seen before from the closet.

“This, is the draft of the contract which you passed to me.”

“Y-yes.”

After seeing the familiar piece of paper shown to her, Lailah nodded.

“Because you took out such a thing, I thought that you had become a little more knowledgeable about the ways of the world. But after looking through it, I feel that I still cannot seriously hear you out for the time being.”

“Is, is there something inadequate? I did reference many templates, and bought books to study.”

“It’s a problem which surfaced even before the content was written. Look here.”

Maou pointed to the bottom of the draft.

That was the area where Lailah, who proposed the contract, and Maou or Emi, who accepted the contract, were supposed to sign. Beside that was the character ‘stamp’ to indicate the position of the stamp.

“Is there anything missing?”

“Lailah-san, this.....”

After skimming through the draft from the side, Chiho immediately noticed what Maou wanted to say.

“The address is missing.”

“Eh?”

“You did not fill in the address field.”

“Address?”

Lailah showed an expression like she had heard a foreign word.

“Was, was such a thing needed?”

“Of course it’s needed! What are you talking about?”

Although Lailah acted like she had been dealt a blow, Chiho felt like she was the one who had received the blow instead.

Even a high school student who had only seen a MgRonalds work contract knew that the thing known as a ‘contract’ needed things like an address, name, and stamp.

Furthermore, Lailah even planned to establish a contract with Maou in a situation where the reward had been agreed upon.

And she did not prepare a field where both sides had to write down their address, even if she was careless, this was really too serious of a mistake.

“But.”

However, Lailah refused to back off.

“I won’t break the contract, even if there are any grievances, we won’t be able to seek the help of legal organisations to settle it, right? Just recording each other’s name and intentions will be.....”

“Pfft!”

Chiho tried to imagine a Demon King and Archangel from a foreign world in court—

“Although I solved the world’s crisis, this person did not pay the agreed upon remuneration!”

“I did follow the stipulations to pay the remuneration!”

“You did not consider the different amount of effort needed to free each of the Sephirah, it’s too unreasonable!”

“That was because when we discussed the remuneration, I had already included the worse case scenario, and I also obtained the agreement of the other party beforehand!”

—and after imagining how it would be like following the procedures of a civil case, she could not help but laugh.

By the way, for the court within Chiho’s imagination, the judge was played by the neighbour of the Demon Fortress living in Room 202, the Inquisitor Crestia Bell—Kamazuki Suzuno.

“T—that’s not it, Lailah-san, Maou-san was not referring to this.”

“T-then what is.....”

“Sasaki Chiho did mention that we’re no different from normal humans, right? But if we had to say it, Lailah is still an ‘angel’.”

“Lucifer?”

“Sigh, that’s how it is.”

Maou nodded to agree with what Chiho and Urushihara had said.

“I don’t know where you live.”

Lailah blinked in shock.

“Let’s forget about Ente Isla for the moment. I don’t know where you are living in this country, and I don’t know how you are supporting your livelihood, and more than that, I don’t know which method you are planning to use to establish a link with this country, I don’t know anything about you.”

Maou said this while looking at the contract draft and the folder placed next to Chiho which was used to explain the world crisis, then he opened the namecard box which he had taken out of the closet, took a few small pieces of paper from within, and placed them on the tatami.

“With my household registration and address recorded as Villa Rosa Sasazuka in Tokyo, Shibuya ward, I am a ‘human’ named Maou Sadao.”

One of them was the driving license which Maou did not want others to see because of the failure which had occurred during the registration photo taking

process.

“This is the Citizen Health Insurance Certificate. This is the Stamp Registration Certificate registered at the ward office. My information as the employee of the MgRonalds in front of Hatagaya station is kept at the MgRonalds Headquarters in Tokyo. How much evidence can you provide that you have existed here, in this world?”

“Evidence, that I’ve existed here.....”

Maou took out items which could verify his identity one after another, and Lailah could not look away.

“Whether it was in the past or now, from our point of view, you are just an ‘angel’ who will appear and disappear at any time, not a ‘human’ living according to the rules of life.”

The statement ‘not a human’ caused Lailah to turn pale.

“Take Sariel for example. Calling himself Mitsuki Sarue, he is an angel and is still our enemy. But that guy’s workplace is very close to mine, and what is irritating is that he seems to be staying at a rather good apartment. From how he had spent a period of time giving tributes to our shop manager, he should have a sizable fortune. Although how he is all smiles when he sees a girl is rather annoying, he seems to have a good relationship with the employees at his workplace. When Suzuno and I went to Ente Isla to rescue Emi, he even said that he would protect the shopping street if anything happened, that is how he has integrated into Hatagaya.”

Maou commented about his enemy Archangel Sariel with regards to factors like his creation of his alias, his workplace, and his past actions.

“If Sariel had spoken on your behalf, I might have heard you out more seriously.”

“Eh? I am worse, than Sariel.....? Is, is it that bad?”

Although Lailah looked like she was genuinely shocked—

“If you want me to elaborate more on this, I believe that a report written by Sariel would be easier to understand. After all, he normally has to create work

shift schedules and instruction manuals.”

—with Chiho’s accompanying blow, she finally sank completely.

“It’s not like I trust that guy’s personality, and I don’t contact him privately either. In addition, he has never shown me his identification. However, as long as Kisaki remains in Hatagaya, he definitely would not leave that place. Even if he gets transferred, he would probably use various methods with his powers as an archangel to stay there. It’s probably like this, his normal way of living is such that he is able to reach a consensus with many people.”

“Although he did treat me badly at the beginning, after many things occurred, if I meet him at the shopping street these days, I will still greet him.”

“Some time back, I also discovered that he is unexpectedly hardworking at work.”

Chiho got rid of past grudges and gave a positive evaluation, Urushihara also expressed the thoughts which he had no right to say after remembering what happened after Maou and Suzuno left for Ente Isla.

“Compared to that, what about you? We don’t even know where you live and how you are getting money. Although you have been frequently appearing in front of us recently, if you disappear again, we won’t know where to find you. Considering what has happened up until now, it’s possible that you might not even appear even if Emi and Nord were in danger.”

“It-it’s not like that.....”

Although Lailah planned to deny it, Maou interrupted her with a firm tone.

“Emi would definitely say something similar. And from my standpoint, you always~~ have been acting sneakily in the shadows, but I still do not know why you have appeared in front of us at this time. You would now occasionally come to the Demon Fortress for dinner, but don’t think that everyone would treat everything which has happened so far as water under the bridge.”

“That is..... because.....”

Perhaps she had finally understood what Maou wanted to say, Lailah hung her head, and her protests became weaker and weaker.

“Simply put, no matter how much emphasis you put on the presentation, your methods still lack sincerity. You seemed to have revealed some information using these files which look like a storybook outline, but this method in which you’re hiding your current situation will only make others suspect that you’re preparing to erase all traces of yourself. Basically, all this information is vague, and the files themselves don’t have much content.”

“.....I’m really..... sorry.”

“With this, we can’t help but suspect the authenticity of this information in the end. Without considering that you angels are an enemy race, this information does not contain anything which would make me want to believe you. This holds even if your actions were for the sake of the future of Alas=Ramus and the others.”

“.....”

“Lailah-san.....”

Chiho placed her hand on the shoulder of Lailah as she hung her head.

“I’m alright, Chiho-san, sorry.”

Lailah kindly rejected that hand.

“He is right. Chiho-san had given me a reminder in Lucifer’s hospital room, but I still made the same mistake.”

“It could be because you have always been acting while hiding in the shadows, you ended up learning shady behaviour.”

“Hey, Lailah. To be told this by Urushihara, don’t you feel ashamed at all?”

“Sheesh, Maou!”

“It’s alright, it can’t be helped that I was criticised this way.”

“Hmm?”

Lailah raised her head a little, turned her head so that she was looking in Urushihara’s direction and said, “For Lucifer to end up like this..... I am responsible for it as well.”

“Huh?”

“Eh?”

It was only now did Maou and Chiho truly express their surprise for the first time.

“I say, don’t use that tone of ‘I am to blame for not teaching this child well’. I’ll really feel hurt, you know.”

Urushihara also glared at Lailah like he truly felt irritated about it.

“But, Lucifer.”

Seeing that Lailah was unwilling to back down, Lucifer shook his head and said, “I didn’t take it to heart, and honestly I really forgot most of it. How long ago did you think it was?”

“I see.....”

After Urushihara had said this, he turned back to the laptop without saying anything more.

Lailah looked at his back with a rather sad expression, and seeing the two of them like this, Maou and Chiho felt unsettled.

“Hey, Chi-chan. I just heard something which could steer Emi’s family conflict in an unbelievable direction.”

“I seemed to have heard something which could not be easily ignored as well.”

“Sheesh, both of you. Don’t misunderstand things on your own, depending on how it is interpreted and the person who interpreted it, the lives of a few people, including mine, might end up ending.”

“Eh? What’s wrong, both of you?”

The one who knew how Maou and Chiho had interpreted this, and the one who did not know, looked towards the two of them.

““Uh, nothing.....””

Maou and Chiho looked away awkwardly at the same time.

“But truly, I understand. Hey, Satan, and also Chiho-san.”

“What is it?”

“Both of you, please forget what happened just now for the time being.”

As she said this, Lailah took back the folder regarding the world crisis from Chiho’s hands.

Then she readjusted her sitting posture, looked at the two of them in the eyes, and spoke, “If you don’t mind, I want to invite the both of you to my home. Of course, it’s my home in Japan.”

“Your.....”

“.....home?”

Chiho showed a surprised reaction while Maou frowned in suspicion.

“That’s right.”

Lailah nodded with force.

“I have moved a few times after coming to Japan, but I have been staying at the same place for the past five years. It’s just that I am frequently unable to return home due to the nature of my job.”

As they did not know whether the nature of the job Lailah was talking about was related to the file on the world crisis, they were unable to judge if this was the answer to Chiho’s question.

“What is there are not files like this, but the information I have gathered around the world for the past few hundred years. In addition, there are literature, spell relics and tools which are only found in Heaven. And also..... if I wish to, I can even help Satan, Emilia, Chiho..... and everyone who has come to this world prepare the angel feather pens. I just need to spend some time to do so.”

“This means.....!”

Chiho got a huge shock after unexpectedly hearing the name of the tool, Maou also raised his eyebrow slightly.

Angel feather pens were a tool made from the wings of archangels. It enabled those who were unable to use the gate opening and closing spells to freely

make ‘Gates’.

Lailah was an archangel, so as long as she wished to do so, she would be able to make angel feather pens.

According to Shiba, Ente Isla’s Heaven had already cut off all contact with Earth, so they were unable to go between these two places via the ‘Gate’, but if Lailah was willing to make angel feather pens for everyone, not taking into account the matter of freeing the Sephirah, it would not be a bad deal for Maou and the others.

Because they were originally made of Lailah’s feathers, even if Lailah erased her tracks later, this could end up being a clue to track her down.

After waiting patiently and finally grasping a solid lead, this caused Chiho to turn towards Maou, but the latter’s speed at reaching a decision was faster than what Chiho expected.

“It’s fine if we go right now, you know?”

““Eh?””

This time it was Chiho and Lailah’s turn to exclaim at the same time.

“But it should be rather inconvenient for Chi-chan right? It’s rather late after all.”

““Eh, uh, erhm.....””

“.....What’s wrong with the both of you?”

The archangel and high school girl simultaneously replied in a flustered manner.

““E-erhm, I need to be mentally prepared first.””

Even the contents of the reply were the same.

“What mental preparation, weren’t you the one who invited us over?”

Maou said to Lailah in irritation, the latter put her palms together and lowered her head as if she was praying.

“S-sorry. I really wish for all of you to come, but I had never expected that you would want to go immediately. Erhm, today, is a little inconvenient.”

"Why? Do you have some appointment later? Emi has to work until 10pm today, are you going to meet her."

"Y-yeah, no, erhm....."

"Hey, could it be..... that even Emi doesn't know about your home yet?"

"!"

Maou's low voice, caused Lailah and Chiho to suck in a breath at the same time.

But their reaction afterwards was different.

Lailah looked away from Maou while Chiho pouted and lowered her head.

"A-actually I have never talked to Emilia about these things yet....."

"What, seriously?!"

Lailah's answer that appeared to be full of excuses caused Maou to widen his eyes in surprise.

"You haven't talked to her about it, huh. How many days do you think have passed since that day?"

One week had already passed since Maou and Emi said that they wanted to negotiate with Lailah.

"I don't want to go to your home before Emi does. Compared to how she would complain to me later, the more important thing is that you would definitely cause Emi to feel unhappy again."

During this period where everyone was exceptionally busy because the year was about to end, Lailah actually had not talked to Emi properly, which side was the problem here.

"T-that's true. I know. I understand. I will tell Emilia properly. B-because of that reason, that's why you can't go today! Sorry! T-tomorrow..... no, if it's the day after tomorrow....."

"The day after tomorrow?" Maou replied scornfully like he was suspicious, and looked towards the work shift timetable stuck on the fridge at the same time.

"Hmph, it just happens that Emi, Chi-chan, and I do not have work shifts after evening. This is a rare chance. Alright, let's decide on the day after tomorrow."

The day after tomorrow was a weekday, but by some kind of coincidence, Maou, Chiho, and Emi did not have work shifts after evening.

"I-I will work hard."

It was only having people visit their home the day after tomorrow, so this kind of reply was really a bit strange, but at least like this, they would be able to slightly unravel the mysterious existence known as Lailah.

"In addition, since I have this opportunity, let me know your phone number. If I don't ask and get information about you when I have the chance, I will feel really uneasy."

"Alright, I understand."

Lailah took out her Slimphone from just now without protest and passed it to Maou after calling up the phonebook.

Maou opened up his own phone and entered the number while looking at both of the phones in turn. After waiting for Chiho to record the number as well, he threw the phone back to Lailah.

"Also, tell Emi about this personally. We would share your contact information to the others on our end, but don't expect Chiho and I to help you contact Emi."

".....I will work hard on that as well."

Maou reminded Lailah about this, and Lailah also nodded in compliance.

Just as things were gradually going to end for the time being, Urushihara suddenly interrupted to ask, "Then, Sasaki Chiho, what kind of mental preparations do you need to make?"

".....Eh, ah, hm."

She had appeared shaken at the beginning, but during the time Lailah invited Maou and the others to her home, Chiho slowly regained her calm.

"Chi-chan? What's wrong?"

Because Chiho's appearance was such that it could be interpreted as feeling depressed, Maou seemed a little worried, but Chiho shook her head tiredly and replied, "No, erhm, I'm fine, my question, was already answered in the conversation just now."

"Is Chiho-san coming as well? If it's possible, I hope that Lucifer, Alsiel-san, and Bell-san could come too....."

"Ah, alright, I will ask them....."

Chiho nodded in a downhearted manner.

"I'm not going, it's troublesome. Even if I go, there's nothing to do."

Just like everyone had predicted, Urushihara refused to go out.

"Then there's still Ashiya and Suzuno? Sigh, it's meaningless if everyone went separately, so let's just ask them. Then we'll see you the day after tomorrow. My work shift ends at 5pm, after we have confirmed that there are no issues regarding Chiho's school schedule, I will inform you about the meeting time again."

"A-alright."

Lailah's tone had been strangely stiff since just now.

"Maou-san, would it be better to invite Nord-san and Emerada-san as well?"

"Hm..... not considering Emerada, Nord is....."

Judging from Lailah's tone just now, even if Nord knew the location, he probably had never gone there before.

It was fine if Emi was the only one who went, but since outsiders like Maou and Chiho were going as well, it was really unreasonable to ignore Nord, who was her partner.

It was just a very normal consideration, but Lailah's expression changed greatly after hearing this.

"Not that person!"

"Huh?" "Eh?" "Why?"

The trio did not expect Lailah to react that way.

"Saying no, you can't act that way....." Maou said in a troubled manner.

Nord was Lailah's husband. On the other hand, to put it in a blunt manner, Maou was just an unrelated outsider.

For it to be alright to invite Maou, and not Nord, what was going on?

"Y-yeah, I know this is very strange, I know, but, if he is coming along as well, then the day after tomorrow....."

"I don't understand what you want to say. If the day after tomorrow is no good, the three of us won't be free for a while, you know!"

Maou looked at the work shift timetable on the fridge and frowned.

"I know, I know that. That's right, it's my fault for leaving things alone until now. It's my fault. Don't worry, I will think of something. And that person might not come, yeah, then the day after tomorrow, the day after tomorrow is fine."

Since Demon King Satan said he was going, as the husband, there was a low possibility that Nord would not go. However if they continued on this topic, it would be troublesome if Lailah changed her mind, so Maou did not rebuke on this.

"Lailah-san..... then, where should we find you on the day after tomorrow?"

"Ah, t-that's right. Uh, Shinjuku. Can we meet up at Shinjuku station? Because we are taking the Ōedo Line, how about we meet at the ticketing gates at the Keiō Line west exit?"

"I understand."

When Chiho went out with her friends, they also often chose to meet up there.

"Satan is alright with it too?"

"Yeah."

"Ehm, I will be responsible for telling that person about my home. I should say this kind of thing personally after all."

"Don't forget that there's still Emi too."

".....Yeah."

Lailah, who strangely started sweating after she heard Nord's name, nodded with a stern expression in response to Maou's reminder.

“.....”

Chiho watched this scene with a rather lonely smile.

“Sigh..... the weather has turned cold.”

Chiho walked on the streets of Sasazuka by herself as she prepared to go home.

Maou originally offered to accompany her home, but Chiho rejected it.

If it was her usual self, she would definitely accept Maou's suggestion happily, but today, she did not want to be alone with Maou.

After all, Lailah seemed to have more to say, and even if the sun had already set, it was still rather busy on the streets at this time, so there was no need to worry about danger.

The angels and demons had no reason to attack Japan right now, and Iron, the reason behind the commotion earlier, was under someone's care, so there were no factors which would cause any danger.

Therefore, Chiho did not want to trouble Maou, this was one of the reasons.

As for the other reason.....

“Maou-san is really kind.”

Chiho said this sentence in a volume which could not be heard by others, her white breath dissipating into the air without being seen by anyone else.

As long as Lailah allowed it, Chiho did not mind going to her home afterwards.

However, as the topic switched to visiting Lailah's home, Emi's face appeared in Chiho's mind.

This thought was of the same nature as Maou questioning why he could go, yet Nord could not.

Abandoning Emi who was her daughter and allowing Chiho, an outsider, to go. Was it appropriate?

The ‘mental preparations’ Chiho had not made was referring to this.

No matter how sturdy the wall Emi had built between her and Lailah was, Lailah should think of ways to climb over that wall and shorten the distance between her and Emi.

If other people knew where Lailah lived before Emi did, and this fact reached Emi’s ears, Emi would definitely be hurt.

With this, Emi’s attitude towards Lailah would surely become harsher.

This had nothing to do with the world crisis, as Emi’s friend, Chiho wanted to avoid this development.

However, the reason why Chiho did not say so immediately was because she harboured the same worries as Maou.

That would be the uncertainty of Lailah’s existence.

If they rejected it carelessly, Maou might lose the chance to approach Lailah.

However, as Chiho was hesitating, Maou immediately said this to Lailah, “**I don’t want to go to your home before Emi does.**”

Maou had properly considered Emi’s feelings.

“Compared to how she would complain to me later, the more important thing is that you would definitely cause Emi to feel unhappy again.”

He might not have been planning to do so, but for Maou to say such stern words to Lailah, he was definitely being considerate of Lailah and Emi.

“It feels nice.”

Ever since he had returned from Ente Isla, Maou had been working hard for Emi’s sake.

It was all for the sake of improving Emi’s mood, work, and relationships.

If Maou was asked about this, he would surely reply ‘It’s not like that. Even if it does look that way, it was all done for my own good’, and deny it further.

However, from Chiho's point of view, no, even if it was not from Chiho's point of view, the more Maou did things which were natural for humans, the more it would appear this way.

While helping others, you would also be helping yourself, on the contrary, doing something which was advantageous to you could also help others.

"It would be great if Yusa-san and Lailah-san could reconcile."

Chiho truly hoped for this.

And at this moment, this might unexpectedly happen in the near future.

It was regretful that Emi still would not actively approach Lailah, but because of Maou's intervention, the distance between Emi and Lailah was gradually shortening.

This could be seen from how Lailah would go to the Demon Fortress for dinner without invitation and the things which could be inferred from the words and actions Emi would accidentally let slip when she was working at MgRonalds.

Just like how Maou would say 'I have no such intentions', Emi would also say 'It's not like that' – with regards to how Maou would consider Emi's feelings and work for her sake.

But Chiho knew.

Recently, Emi had been able to smile in front of Maou more frequently than before.

".....I hate this."

Chiho hated herself who thought that way.

However, the more she wanted to deny these thoughts within herself, the more the words like what Urushihara said would cause chaos within Chiho's heart.

"What Sasaki Chiho said just now also contained the meaning 'This person is different from what I originally thought', the fact that you feel honestly happy about this is also a bit strange."

Different from what I originally thought. She did not want to admit that she had shown that kind of mocking attitude.

However, depending on how this was interpreted by others, she had no confidence to say that she was not like that at all when seen through the eyes of others.

It felt different from what was she had originally thought.

Since a long time ago, Chiho had always hoped for Maou and Emi to get along harmoniously.

She truly wished that the two of them would not hate each other, find common ground within each other's feelings, and bid farewell to their bitter past in Ente Isla.

This thought was slowly materialising before her eyes.

Even so.

“Why.....”

Why was her heart in such turmoil?

Although this was her own wish, although she still wished from the bottom of her heart that it would come true, although she felt happy about it, behind that happiness, helpless dark feelings were hidden.

Every time Emi smiled at Maou, every time Maou showed concern for Emi, this feeling would expel all of Chiho's joy, planning to control Chiho.

“No.”

It felt different from what was she had originally thought.

“I hate this.”

Different from what she originally thought.

“Why do I...”

No.

“This kind of thing...”

“Chiho-dono!”

“Chi nee-chan!”

“.....uh?”

Just as Chiho was about to reach Sasazuka station, familiar faces were suddenly heard from in front of her, causing her to look up quickly in surprise.

In order to suppress her chaotic feelings which were as dark as night, Chiho seemed to have lowered her head subconsciously and was gritting her teeth while walking.

After recognising the silhouette of the other party, Chiho wanted to naturally show a smile, but noticed that her expression had frozen up instead.

“Suzuno-san and Alas=Ramus-chan.....”

The voices which approached her clearly belonged to Kamazuki Suzuno who lived in Room 202 of the apartment.

“Eh?”

But her appearance was different from usual.

Chiho, who almost thought she had identified the wrong person, momentarily forgot about the dark thoughts which were occupying her heart and rubbed her eyes.

Suzuno still had the same attire from when she was first spotted by Chiho, and lightly ran up to Chiho while holding Alas=Ramus's hand.

“Chi nee-chan, allo!”

“Are you heading home from the apartment? Is Lailah there as well?”

“Y-yeah, that's right, but..... e, eh?”

In this cold, Suzuno's and Alas=Ramus's faces had turned red.

“It's rare to see you dressed so warmly. But since you're going to the apartment, this is really a complete cold prevention strategy.”

“Chi nee-chan looks like Rilakkuma.”

Chiho could not even fake a smile at Alas=Ramus who said that she was Rilakkuma and could only stare at Suzuno with wide eyes.

“Eh, ehh, ehh, erhm, Suzuno-san.”

“I went out to take advantage of the supermarket limited sale period, Chiho-dono, did you know about the shop which resembles a bazaar and will frequently change their product offerings?”

“Y-yeah.”

“That place is selling very cute hair pins. Look at this hairpin, I really love this snow crystal like cross shaped accessory. Because of that, I pushed back my original purpose and browsed around the shopping street, which was why I ended up returning at this time.”

“Look look! Suzu nee-chan gave this to me!”

Alas=Ramus was wearing a beanie which Chiho had never seen before and the young girl showed Chiho the top of her head as if she was preparing to execute a headbutt.

“I-I see. That’s great, it really suits you. Very nice, hm, but, Alas=Ramus-chan, I’m sorry, can you wait for a bit?”

“Uh?”

Carrying a reusable bag, Suzuno and Alas=Ramus were very excited. On the wrist of Suzuno’s left hand which was holding Alas=Ramus’s hand, was a watch with a thin strap.

“Erhm, sorry, Suzuno-san, it might be strange for me to ask this.....”

“Hmm?”

“W-why are you dressed this way?”

“Hm? Oh, this?”

As if it was the first time Suzuno noticed her own attire, she blushed and answered, “I picked it myself. Is it strange?”

“N-no, it suits you. I’m just a little surprised that Suzuno-san.....”

Chiho appraised Suzuno’s attire from head to toe.

“.....would actually wear western clothes.”

Suzuno wore a hair clip in her hair as usual, but underneath her grey shawl coat wrap, she wore a blue knitted dress over a white shirt, and for her legs, she wore thick black leggings and ankle boots.

“Didn’t the weather suddenly turn cold recently? When the day temperature was still high some time back, I was leisurely saying that it was about time to switch to winter attire, but it suddenly became like this. It even snowed a few days ago.”

“Y-yeah.”

“Honestly, if I wore the kimonos I had on hand, it’d be really cold.”

“True.....”

“I’ve heard that patterned kimonos can also be worn in winter, but there is still empty space within the sleeves. Wearing thick inner wear inside would increase the weight on the shoulders, and still does not solve the problem of the sleeves. I do live in that apartment after all. I feel bad saying this about Shiba-dono, but it is really easy to feel very cold even if heating facilities were used.”

“I understand where you’re coming from.”

Because Chiho could imagine such a situation, she had dressed this warmly.

“After I made up my mind and tried it on, I realised that western clothes were cheaper and warmer.”

Chiho did not know what kind of kimono a patterned kimono was, but to explain it simply, Suzuno had lost to the cold and price and changed her usual habit of wearing kimonos.

“However, I have only compromised by treating western clothing as home wear, when formal occasions arise, I will still change into a kimono. As for this sh..... shawl coat or something like that.”

“Are you referring to a shawl coat wrap?”

“Yes, that. A shawl. If it’s a gray shawl, it would be fine even if I wore it over a kimono. I have integrated with Japan rather well, so it would be better to learn how to wear both kimono and western clothing.”

“Yeah, Suzuno-san is really cute.”

The last time she saw Suzuno wear western clothing was during her own and Emi's combined birthday party. Once Suzuno wore an attire which could blend into the streets of Japan, she looked like a normal youthful lady. (Even if she thought so, Chiho did not know Suzuno's actual age.)

“Have you been dressed like this recently?”

She said recently, but only three days had passed since Chiho and Suzuno last met.

At that time, Suzuno was still wearing her usual familiar kimono.

“It was only two days ago did I give up and bought western clothing because I could not tolerate the cold any longer. Because I own very little western clothing, I am still considering if I should increase the amount of western clothing or insist on wearing kimonos like before. Thanks to that, I brought Alas=Ramus to many stores today. You should be tired, right?”

“Not tired!”

There were still many mysteries with regards to Alas=Ramus's stamina and power, but at least she did not show any signs of boredom or fatigue while she accompanied an adult to buy things.

Chiho had not noticed because she was too tense earlier, but now that she had taken a closer look at it, the beanie Suzuno had bought Alas=Ramus had letter patterns on them and looked very interesting.

“Suzuno-san is really determined about this.”

Suzuno's words still showed that she had not given up on her intent to continue wearing kimonos, and although it was strange to treat this as something to feel proud of, Suzuno really looked very attractive in western clothes, so Chiho felt that it would be good if she took the chance to wear western clothing instead.

“That's right. That damn Demon King, when he met me in the corridor, he actually showed an expression as if he had seen a monster.”

“Maou-san did?”

"Yes. The first thing he said when he opened his mouth was 'It's winter now, how did you end up with a fever?' Don't you feel that it's really rude?"

It was so hard to rebuke this. She frequently heard the saying of burning up during summer, but it was also normal to come down with a cold during winter.

Just as Chiho was thinking this, Suzuno said nonchalantly, "Sigh, because he did say that it suited me in the end, I'll let it pass."

"Maou-san said that?"

"Yes. Although he looked reluctant while doing so," Suzuno said with a wry smile.

Seeing that smile, Chiho's restless heart which she had suppressed by lowering her head started making black waves once again.

"Maou-san....."

"Hmm?"

"Ah, nothing....."

However, Chiho felt that letting others know about this change in her heart was a really bad thing, so she made use of the fact that it was difficult to see facial expressions in the darkening light to shake her head and brush over the topic.

Suzuno, who did not appear especially concerned, frowned after looking behind Chiho.

"Come to think of it, even if there isn't much to worry about right now, to allow Chiho-dono to go home alone at night, the Demon King is really too tactless."

"Eh? Ah, it's not like that....."

Strange?

"After all, the dangers in normal life is not just restricted to angels and demons. Hmm, but every time Chiho-dono is in danger, it always has something to do with angels and demons, so this should be the stranger situation."

What is going on?

"Chiho-dono, if you're going home directly after this, then please allow me to accompany you."

".....There, there's no need, it's fine."

"I'm not in a rush, and this is what we do normally, is it not?"

It felt like today—

"I'm fine....."

".....Chiho-dono?"

"Chi nee-chan?"

—she was really useless.

"I-I....."

Although she hated this.

"W-what's wrong? Did something happen?"

Faced with such a sudden situation, Suzuno frantically studied Chiho's face from below.

"Although I'm fine....."

The tears fell.

Chiho thought, she actually cried because of such an insignificant and meaningless reason.

Even so, she could not stop.

"Erhm, what's wrong, what did the Demon King do, no, the Demon King would not do anything strange to Chiho-dono, you don't look injured as well. I understand. Is it Lucifer? Did he say something insensitive again....."

"Chi nee-chan, hurt? Hurt, pain? Blow away for you? Pain, fly away!"

Seeing Chiho suddenly start crying where she stood, the flustered Suzuno started rambling, as for Alas=Ramus, she used her small hands to pat Chiho's knee as if she was trying to blow something away.

"S-sorry, sorry....."

“A-anyway, Chiho-dono, please calm down first. T-that’s right, I remember that there is a café at the station, erhm, although I don’t know what happened, this place is too cold. Okay? Let’s change location and drink something warm.....”

Suzuno showed a flustered appearance which did not match her usual style and led Chiho to Sasazuka station.

Just as Chiho and Suzuno walked into Excentricksior Café^[4] underneath the bridge of Sasazuka station, another person appeared like they were a replacement—

“Oh dear, it’s already this late. I wonder if Sasaki-san has gone home.”



—running out from the area around the Sasazuka station ticketing gate in a flustered manner.

Holding a reusable bag containing groceries from various places, the slender man—Ashiya Shiro, rubbed his cold hands and left Sasazuka station.

※

“Good morning, Saemi.”

“Ah, Akiko-san, good morning.”

During work hours, the employees still used good morning to greet each other even if it was already 6pm.

Just before her break ended, Emi, who had a shift from 12pm to 10pm, met her senior Ooki Akiko who reported to work at 6pm.

Akiko was the same age as Kawada, but she was hired as a staff of the MgRonalds in front of Hatagaya station half a year later, and was also one schooling year below Kawada.

According to Akiko, she seemed to have ‘underestimated the exams, so she had to re-take them before’.

As university life during the second half of November was extremely busy, Emi had not seen Akiko recently. In fact, the last time Emi and Akiko had met was around one week ago.

“Saemi.”

“Yes?”

Just as Emi kept the book she was reading into the cupboard, Akiko, who was preparing to change, spoke to her.

“You originally worked at another place before this right? Something like a salary worker’s job.”

“That’s right. At Docodemo’s customer service centre.”

“Customer service centre? How long did you have that job?”

“Around a year and a half. Afterwards, because there was a problem in my hometown, I was unable to go to work for a long time, so I was fired.”

Being imprisoned in a foreign world and battling with demons, from Emi's point of view, this could simply be described a problem in her hometown.

Akiko frowned when she heard the term 'fired'.

"Uwah, being fired because of a long period of absenteeism is too pitiful. But a year and a half is considered very long, isn't it? I couldn't stand it after two months."

"You did work in this area before?"

"I was responsible for making phone calls."

"Basically, I was responsible for picking up calls."

Under the category of customer service centre, it could still be divided further to three types, Emi's previous workplace was in charge of answering customer queries, which would be the 'Incoming Calls' Department.

It was not known which industry call centre Akiko had worked in the past, but based on the phrase 'making phone calls', she was probably responsible for selling products to customers and helping to take orders.

Depending on the company, there were also places where staff were responsible for picking up and making calls.

"Didn't Kouta leave some time back in order to find a job? It caused me to frequently remember about things during that period."

"Oh."

"I had heard that customer service work was very difficult and tiring, but the first place I worked at was a large scale company which published educational material. So, the customers should mainly be mothers with children, right? I obviously thought that there should be nothing to fear from such people."

".....Everyone would think so in the beginning."

Emi, who largely predicted what happened afterwards, showed a wry smile.

"Not long after I started work, an old man who called told me that Japan had declined because of me."

"That logic jump is really too outrageous."

Akiko did not elaborate further on the story and nodded, fully agreeing with Emi.

"How should I put it, I feel that the more 'normal' the person is, the greater the fluctuation in their personality and emotions. In fact, those people who are displeased or angry in the beginning, even if they might shout loudly, a method to solve the issue will be found in the end."

By the way, when Emi was working at docodemo, an old man who caused her to carry the burden of Japan's future followed the logic process of 'recent electronics do not consider the elderly at all → because you young people are only concerned about electronics, that is why Japan invested all their money into heavy industries and electronics → and every young person would show an attitude like they knew everything about the world although they are only staring at their mobile phone screen, it's really saddening → on the other hand, places are going into a slump, and agriculture is on the brink of collapse → actually staying in a company which would lead to Japan's decline, you're really too much → you should go learn more about the outside world → because you're like this, Japan is in decline' and spoke about this at length for three hours, with shouting and lectures mixed in.

Emi would not be shaken because of such ridiculous verbal abuse, but as she was still unused to the work and did not know what the customer wanted to enquire at the end of it all, that enquiry left a deep impression on her.

After forcefully making Emi agree to vote in the next election, that customer hung up.

After that, the floor manager, her friend Suzuki Rika and a few colleagues who had joined the company at the same time as Emi treated her to lunch, that was how bad that case was. For some time, that case even became the benchmark for what was considered a 'troublesome case' for that floor.

"Yeah, it was like that. At that time, I felt really depressed because I was worried that I would not be employed in the future. I have already regained the capability of talking to customers face to face after working here, but once I sit down and pick up calls, it will awaken traumatic memories of the past. Because of that, perhaps that's why Kisaki-san appointed Saemi to be in charge of

picking up calls.”

“But strange enquiries only leave a deep impression because they are very strange. In reality, 99% of cases are not like that. Since Akiko-san can handle normal enquiries, then there shouldn’t be anything to worry about, right?”

“That is true. But the experience of being treated as a murderer even though I am just promoting teaching materials is really too difficult to forget.”

Emi was curious about what had happened such that Akiko turned out this way, but after she checked the clock and noticed that break time was almost over, she quickly put on her employee cap and headphones.

“Then again, how did we get to this topic?”

“Eh? Yeah, now that you mentioned it.....”

Akiko, who also completed her preparations for work, clapped her hands once.

“I am not too sure about this, but Saemi’s friend seemed to have come to the store.”

“Eh? My friend?”

“Yeah, it’s a lady. It felt like I have seen her a few times before, and because she gave an impression of being a salary worker, I thought she might be a colleague from Saemi’s previous workplace.”

With this description, only one person came to Emi’s mind.

“Hi..... Emi.”

“It’s Rika after all! Why did you come so suddenly?”

When Emi noticed Suzuki Rika sitting in a corner while awkwardly drinking a large cup of hot coffee, she ran towards Rika with a smile.

“Have you knocked off for the day?”

“Y-yeah. I got off work earlier today, and since I have nothing to do in the

evening, I came to see Emi.”

“I see. I’m sorry though, I still can’t get off work. I’m working until 10pm today.....”

“I know. I heard about it.”

“Eh? Ah, is that so?”

Who did she hear it from?

Like Chiho, Rika now knew about Emi’s and Maou’s true identities, and the incidents surrounding Ente Isla.

Because Rika contacted Chiho and Suzuno more frequently than before, she probably heard about it from them?

However, regardless of who told her, since she knew that Emi could only get off work four hours later, why did she come over at this time?

Emi felt confused about this, but as if Rika had guessed Emi’s thoughts, she responded frantically, “S-sorry. I knew that you would only knock off very late, but, erhm, because I felt restless, I wanted to see Emi’s face to calm myself down.”

“.....What’s wrong, did something happen?”

At this time, Emi also noticed that Rika was acting unnaturally.

She was speaking very quickly, and her eyes were shifting left and right. Her body was also swaying continuously like she could not sit still.

Seeing this, Emi remembered that Rika had acted unnaturally like this once before.

“Erhm, Emi, you don’t have to start work very early tomorrow morning, right?”

“Y-yeah.”

“I’ll wait for you here, if you feel that I’m an eyesore, I can also kill time somewhere else.”

“I won’t feel that way.”

"So after you end work today..... can you spend some time with me? I will treat you to dinner."

"I'm alright with spending time with you, but are you really okay?"

"Uh..... erhm, I'll tell you about that later."

Emi rarely saw Rika acting this hesitant.

"I'll be really bothered like this and won't be able to concentrate on work. If you wish to discuss something with me, I wish to be prepared for it before knocking off work."

"Hmm..... I see? Erhm, it's actually not that important."

Already showing such an unnatural attitude, how could it be something unimportant?

"The thing is, I'm telling you now."

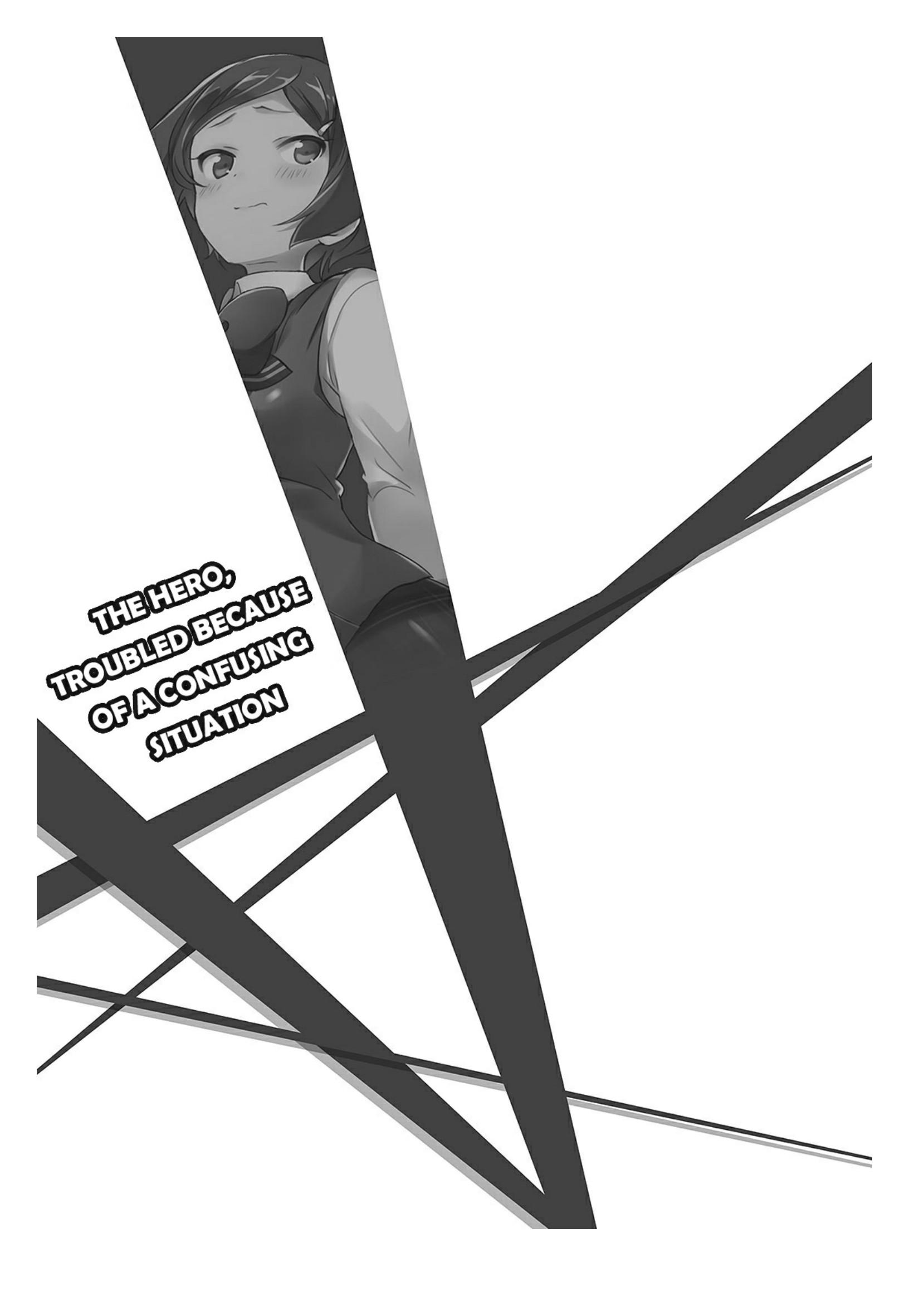
"Yeah."

After Rika paused for a while, she breathed deeply two or three times before finally speaking, "Just now..... Ashiya-san called and asked me out....."

".....Oh..... oh, yeah."

Emi replied as if she had a realisation, what she had an impression of referred to this.

In the end, Emi still could not focus on work.



**THE HERO,
TROUBLED BECAUSE
OF A CONFUSING
SITUATION**

Chapter 2: The Hero, Troubled because of a Confusing Situation

“Hello, Bell? Sorry for calling you this late. It’s a bit sudden, but can I stay at your place tonight? Yeah, I just got off work, but something sudden came up..... Rika came to the store. She seemed to have something important to say, I will try my best to avoid satying out too late, but I might not be able to make it for the last train.”

“It is fine. Please help me send greetings to Rika-dono. Hmph!”

“Eh? Uh, erhm, thank you. I’ll send a message when I’m about to go back, are you alright?”

“Yes. I will be sleeping at a later time than usual, so there is no need to rush. Take your time..... damn it! It will be fine as long as you contact me before you return..... too noisy! I am fine.”

“I-I see, thanks.....”

It seemed to be really rowdy on the other end of the line.

Occasional strange shouts and people scolding each other could be heard, mixing in with Suzuno’s voice.

It did not seem like Suzuno felt angry because of Emi returning late, but on the other end of the line, low pitch sounds resembling that of a futon being hit could be heard.

“Oh yes. Lailah seems to have something to say to you, she is waiting at the apartment.”

“Eh?”

Emi frowned, but it was useless even if she were to complain to Suzuno about this.

"It seems to be something completely different from that request she usually talks about....."

"Did she tell you anything else?"

"I was informed as well..... ah, noisy! I am on the phone, be quiet!"

"Bell?"

From this, it appeared that there were other people on the other end of the line besides Suzuno.

And from how Suzuno spoke, it had to be the three men from the Demon Fortress.

"Could it be that you're busy right now?"

"That is correct, but do not worry. I am currently controlling the situation and Alas=Ramus is on my side."

What were they doing? Emi could not imagine it at all.

"Anyway, I have heard about it, but I feel that Lailah should tell you this personally, so I am unable to pass on the message. She said that she would wait for you regardless of the time, so please look for Lailah first after coming back, she will probably wait for you in Nord-dono's room."

".....I understand."

"Then I am hanging up..... alright, if there are other excuses....."

After using a dangerous tone at the end, Suzuno hung up.

"W-what happened....."

The most probable situation was that Maou must have made some mistake in front of Suzuno and made her angry, but what about the part of Alas=Ramus being on Suzuno's side?

To Maou, rather than being hit by Suzuno, being hated by Alas=Ramus would cause him more damage.

"Sigh, forget it. Compared to that."

Emi used her Slimphone and sent a message to Emerada who was at her

Eifuku apartment, telling Emerada that she was going to stay at Suzuno's apartment tonight.

After Emi had received Emerada's reply which showed that she understood the message, Emi exhaled quickly.

"Alright, from this moment, I should keep up my spirits!"

In the end, Rika waited at the store for Emi to get off work.

This was not the first time Rika had consulted Emi to discuss about Ashiya.

However, there was a huge difference between the consultation this time and the one before that.

The difference would be that Rika now knew about Ashiya's true identity.

She had never seen Ashiya Shiro's demon form—Great Demon General Alsiel—but Rika already knew what Ashiya had done in the past, and his current reason for living.

Even so—

"Ashiya-san called and asked me out....."

Based on this.

".....What should I do? Sigh."

Emi looked up at the clock, it was already past 10:15pm.

It would be bad to make Rika wait for so long, and if she ended up going home too late because she was troubled for too long, it would cause trouble for Suzuno as well.

"I guess I can only play by ear."

After Emi had made her decision, she walked out of the employees' room in a determined manner. Then after saying goodbye to all her colleagues including Akiko, Emi walked out of the store together with Rika.

"Sorry for coming to find you so suddenly."

Rika followed behind Emi in a more timid manner compared to usual.

"It's fine. I should be the one feeling bad for making you wait for so long. I

wanted to suggest getting something to eat, but Rika already ate a lot, right?"

"Ah, yeah. But if you have something you wish to eat, that's okay too."

"Even if you say that, we can only choose an Izakaya^[5] at this kind of time."

"Going to a store which sells alcohol..... will it be alright?"

"Why do you ask? Haven't we frequently gone to this kind of place together before?"

"Because, Emi isn't actually 20 years old yet, right?"

"Ah, I see."

Rika was concerned that according to Japan's laws, Emi was still underaged.

"The regulations aren't that strict on the other side, and my registration in Japan says that I am already 21 years old, so there shouldn't be any issues with regards to this. You don't wish to drink?"

"Y-yeah, it's not like I can't, but I'm not confident of being able to keep calm....."

Rika already looked flustered right now, so if she was allowed to drink alcohol, it might be difficult to have a proper conversation, therefore Emi nodded and replied, "There's a family restaurant ahead, would that place be fine?"

"Yeah, I feel a bit bad about this."

Rika kept apologising today.

"It's fine. However..... I might say some harsh things to Rika later, so there's no need to treat me today. Let's just eat normally."

".....Yeah."

After they had decided on the way to go, Emi and Rika headed towards the family restaurant with rather heavy steps.

After 10:30pm, there were a significant number of empty seats in the family restaurant.

After picking a non-smoking table, wanting to eat a proper meal after knocking off work, Emi ordered clam spaghetti with a soup, salad, and drink bar

set meal. As for Rika, she only ordered the drink bar.

“It feels like it’s been a long time since we went to a store to eat together.”

“It’s not like before where we can go home together after all. Rika would be the one to invite me every time, although I did feel happy, I also felt guilty about it.”

“It’s alright. No matter the reason, it would still feel awkward to go to the area near the company which fired you.”

“No, it’s not. Because Rika had brought me to all those stores near the company, I quickly got used to the food in Japan. Next time, I will find you instead, and if the timing can match up, let’s invite Maki for a meal together as well.”

“Those stores nearby change very quickly. Do you remember that Russian restaurant that everyone would often go to? It closed last month.”

“Eh? The sour cream beef there was really delicious!”

“An Italian restaurant opened there after that. Regretfully, the food there wasn’t good at all. There are already so many Italian restaurants in the area, but it was still at this average standard. And because the interior decorations retained part of the original design, it was even more disappointing.”

“Even so, that store’s Russian style decorations were really fashionable, if it became a Gyuudon store or Ramen store, it would still be weird.”

As the two of them were talking about random things, the spaghetti set Emi ordered coincidentally arrived.

“I feel hungry looking at it.”

“Do you want to order something as well?”

“Hm~ but I have been rarely exercising recently, eating something this substantial at this time..... hm~”

After being troubled about it, Rika did not order anything in the end, and Emi quickly finished what she had ordered.

After that, as if she wanted to compose herself, Rika went to the drink bar to

get herself a glass of herbal tea, then upon returning, straightened her posture and faced Emi.

“Then let’s start.”

“Yeah.”

Emi nodded after using cold water to cleanse her mouth.

“It feels like I told you something similar over the phone before. The reason Ashiya-san asked me out was because he hoped I could provide suggestions with regards to buying a mobile phone.”

“In other words, he plans to ask you to bring him around the electronics department.”

When Maou bought a television in the past, Ashiya had told Rika that he was thinking of buying a mobile phone and asked her for her opinions.

In the end Ashiya had not bought a mobile phone that day, and after that, a lot of troubles happened one after another, causing Ashiya to be unable to buy a mobile phone at all.

“Sigh, so it’s something like that.”

Rika did not deny it.

“Because he had hidden a lot of things from me, as an act of apology, he even invited me to have a meal together.”

“Puh!”

Emi almost crushed the glass cup containing the cold water on reflex.

“A-a meal?”

A guy inviting a girl out for a meal was a common occurrence, but it was a little different if the parties concerned were Ashiya and Rika.

“A-and then?”

“I had no reason to reject it, so I agreed. Very enthusiastically too.”

Emi did not know where they carried out this enthusiastic conversation, but either way, Rika had happily accepted Ashiya’s invitation.

“I-I see.”

As Emi was feeling confused, she also imagined the scene of the two of them eating together, then started to feel troubled.

The other party was that Ashiya after all.

What Ashiya believed was slightly different compared to what others normally thought, and he also thought that it was meaningless to dress up nicely and put up a good front for others.

If it was Maou, he might have been strangely concerned about appearances and choose a rather good store.

In fact, Emi had seen Maou dress up nicely and go on a date.

She found out later that Ashiya had chosen the clothes, but adding on what she knew about Maou’s attitude at work, Emi quickly built up an impression that Maou would still dress appropriately during formal occasions.

On the other hand, look at Ashiya.

Ashiya’s usual attire was very neat and tidy, but unlike Maou, Emi had no deep impressions about Ashiya’s clothes at all.

No matter how much Emi tried to recall, she could only remember the lightweight attire Ashiya had worn during summer and when doing manual labour, the only difference was the decrease of cloth.

“E-erhm, which store is he going to take you to for the meal?”

“I have no idea. But I have a rough idea of what you’re worried about.”

Rika showed a troubled smile at Emi who could not suppress the disturbances in her heart.

“I am aware of Maou-san’s household situation. So I wouldn’t mind eating Manmaru Udon^[6] or MgRonalds.”

“I think it would be better to be more bothered by it.”

However, if Rika could accept it, Emi could not say anything more about it.

“Then, is that all you wanted to discuss with me?”

"I don't think it would help to discuss with Emi regarding what Ashiya-san would eat."

That was true.

"Earlier, didn't you say that you might say some harsh things to me? In other words, that is the issue."

"That is the issue refers to....."

"Hmm, to put it simply, we would probably be discussing about the things Maou-san and you had told me again. Ashiya-san probably asked me out just to apologise to me privately. He also told me that himself."

"I see....."

Since earlier, Emi had been repeatedly using this simple way to reply.

"Sigh, so."

When she reached this part, Rika started to become restless.

"With things as they are now, erhm, I plan to take a gamble."

"Eh? What? Take a gamble?"

"Y-yeah, erhm, listen."

"Yeah."

Rika's face turned redder and redder. She squirmed and appeared hesitant to speak.

Even so, Rika still made up her mind, and announced after taking a few deep breaths, "H-honestly, I, erhm, like, like Ashiya-san, so....."

"I know that, so?"

".....Eh?"

"Eh?"

".....Why?"

"You're asking why, eh?"

"Eh?"

Rika, who was blushing, and Emi, who had a serious expression, fell into silence after looking at each other.

“You..... already knew, eh?”

“Rika, are you feeling surprised at the fact that I know about this?”

“.....Yeah, b-because, when I am talking to you about this, I’m actually super embarrassed.....”

Perhaps it was really like this, Emi felt bad thinking this about Rika, but from Emi’s point of view, it was too late for Rika to say this now.

“I’m sorry..... but after seeing how you act when you and Alsiel are together, I think anyone would notice it.”

“.....Is that so?”

“Probably.”

“Then how about Ashiya-san.....”

“Unexpectedly, he might not have noticed..... but the Demon King, Bell, and the others probably have noticed it already.”

Rika blinked in surprise, then—

“Maou-san and Suzuno-chan..... ack?”

“Rika?”

She suddenly produced a strange scream, and her forehead hit the table with such force that the cup almost flew into the air.

“That’s——righhhhtttttt! How could I have forgotten? D-didn’t he just tell me that dayyyyyyy!”

“W-wait, Rika, calm down a little! Why are you suddenly acting like this?! ”

“Waughhhhhh, he said so before, he noticed it, that’s right, that day, Maou-san uuuuuu.”

“The Demon King? What did the Demon King tell you? That day, are you referring to the day they went to buy the television?”

“Yesss——! That day! Maou-san, said this to me before, that he understood

my feelings, gahhhhhh!"

The young lady who was hesitant about being honest about her feelings just a moment ago started groaning in a raspy voice and struggling in pain like a Malebranche whose claw was shattered.

"Could it be that you like Ashiya'! Maou-san! Maou-san said that at that time! He said this to me before! Ahhhhhh! I remember that Suzuno-chan hit and grabbed the front of Maou-san's shirt later ahhhhh! What is this?! What am I doing?! Why do I always encounter such embarrassing things every time Ashiya-san is involved? Am I an idiot? So embarrassing, embarrassing, shameful, what kind of shameful life is this?!"

".....Demon King..... ugh!"

She did not know the circumstances which led to them having this conversation, but Emi decided that she should find an opportunity in the following days to sternly ask Maou about what had happened .

"Don't worry, don't worry Rika. That Demon King might not be that considerate of others, but he would not tell other people about such things that easily, Alsiel..... Ashiya probably has not heard about this from anyone."

"Is—that so? It feels as if someone has already told himmm?"

Rika looked up, the area around her nose was already completely red and her eyes were filled with tears.

"It, it'll be fine. Nothing bad will happen. Since Bell almost strangled the Demon King that day, that means that the information only reached Bell at most....."

"It feels like you don't really believe what you just said, am I mistaken?"

".....Sorry, I'm can't guarantee that."



“Uwahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!”

Emi, who was unable to lie to Rika, honestly said what was on her mind.

“B-but, Ashiya personally asked you out this time. You didn’t sense anything strange at that time, correct? Then it will definitely be alright. Let’s look on the bright side!”

“T-that’s true, Ashiya-san was acting the same as usual over the phone, so uneasy, I suddenly feel uneasy! Ashiya-san’s previous job is of an intellectual nature like that of a military strategist, right? Could it be that he is just hiding it very well so that others won’t find outttt?!”

“I already said it would be fine! That man is unexpectedly driven by emotions, so he’s not the type to hide things.”

Ashiya only became driven by emotions when Maou was insulted, when Urushihara carelessly spent money, when household finances became tight, and when unexpected spending occurred, but Emi intentionally did not mention this.

“T-then, Rika, what did you want to discuss with me? If you wanted to ask about Alsiel, then I’m sorry. Even if Rika already knows about them, the things I can tell you won’t be much different from what I’ve told you before!”

“Uuuu.....”

Rika looked up at Emi once again with tears in her eyes.

Though she showed that kind of expression, Emi really had nothing else to say.

Whether it was with regards to Ashiya Shiro, or Demon General Alsiel, Emi did not know any personal information which she could tell Rika.

Even without considering their past grudges, Emi only knew he had a thrifty personality, was homely, always wore clothes which were cost-effective and was not a picky eater.

Ashiya was not as concerned about qualifications and licenses like Maou was, but he still frequently went to the library to accumulate a rich amount of knowledge and would occasionally display strangely human talents to support

the Demon Fortress's finances.

However, when it came to facts about Ashiya's achievements, Emi had only heard about most of them from others and witnessed very few.

With regards to home cooking, his skills were first rate, this was a strength which Emi would willingly acknowledge defeat in.

Ashiya seemed to be bad at using electronics, but that was simply because there were none at home and he rarely had an opportunity to use them. Since Ashiya had already asked Rika to provide suggestions when buying mobile phones, she should know this very clearly.

"So what I can tell you is really not much different from what I said before, honestly I don't know any information which would be useful during a date....."

"Don't call it a date! Wouldn't that make things awkward? It's not like he thinks of it that way!"

"Then what did you want me to say?"

"That's true! Ah~ why do I have to encounter such embarrassing things?!"

Emi was the one who wanted to ask this question.

After Rika panicked on the cushioned seat for a while, she adjusted her breathing with a blush.

"Erhm, what I wanted to discuss with you..... ah~ seriously, so embarrassing, so warm, my heart hurts..... I want to confirm this with Emi first! I....."

As Rika kept revealing her inner thoughts, a scene appeared in Emi's mind.

Emi had seen this expression and show of emotion before.

"Can, can I like Ashiya-san?"

"....."

As Emi was thinking, 'So it was like that after all', she nodded and replied, "Even if you're asking it like this, I'll still feel troubled."

"Hey?"

Emi's reply caused Rika to lean forward.

“B-but, other than Emi, there’s no one else I can ask.”

“Why?”

“You’re still asking why..... because Ashiya-san.....”

Rika spoke agitatedly. Seeing that expression, Emi smiled subconsciously.

“Because Ashiya is the comrade of the demons who destroyed my home?
How is that related to Rika?”

“I.....”

Rika could not help but stand up.

For an instant, the two lines of sight of different elevations, intersected over the table.

“.....Is there no relation?”

“I don’t think there is.”

Emi looked at Rika in the eyes and said this.

“Is that so?”

“Yeah.”

“.....Why?”

Rika sucked in a breath.

“I had already gone through that stage some time ago.”

“Gone through that stage?”

“Yeah.”

Emi calmly picked up the glass she had nearly crushed and drank a mouthful of cold water.

“Our recent relationship cannot be considered close, but what I am sure of is that the relationship between Alsiel and I is still that of enemies.”

“Yeah, so.....”

“Even so, I am unable to take away Rika’s feelings of liking Alsiel.”

For someone to repeat her own feelings directly back to her, the temperature

on Rika's face rose a little again.

"Because you also still liked Alsiel despite knowing the history between him and I, that's why you're bothered by my affairs, right?"

"Yeah, erhm, other than Emi, Suzuno and Emerada are like that as well, since they are people from Ente Isla after all."

Rika did not notice that Emi had said 'also'.

"That's true. But even so, it's still alright."

Within Emi's mind, Rika's face overlapped with the face of another important friend of Emi.

"I cannot actively cheer for you, if Alsiel plans to do anything dangerous, I will prioritise the safety of the surroundings over Rika's feelings. However, I am still responsible for them coming to Japan. Rika simply met him by coincidence without knowing anything and started liking him. Do you think I have a right to lecture you about this?"

Thinking about it, the previous time this topic was discussed, it was also after a meal.

That girl was probably as surprised as Rika was now.

"Therefore, from now onwards, Rika's feelings can only be decided by Rika."

".....I see."

Rika finally sat down and stared at Emi's face in a daze.

"I thought that I would be told to consider the feelings of the people of Ente Isla, or lectured about not knowing anything about war."

"I won't say such things, but what I will be saying next is crueler. Because....."

"I know. What you want to say is depending on the situation, you might just mercilessly kill off the person I like, correct?"

"That's how it is."

Emi nodded with a wry smile.

"That's the only thing I won't compromise on. Although this is rather

meaningless now.”

“Eh?”

“Because I no longer think that those guys will harm anyone in Japan. So as long as they still remain in Japan, I will definitely not kill them. In the past, because I still had to take revenge for my father, I had to support myself with feelings of hatred, so I needed to draw a line between me and them.”

“I see.....”

Rika sighed lightly.

“Then..... how does Emi see Maou-san and the others now?”

“.....They’re enemies.”

Emi hesitated.

Rika did not miss that out. Emi clearly knew that as well.

“My father is still alive in the end, but what those guys did caused my life to deviate greatly..... another path which should have existed, this had undoubtedly happened. In addition, the regrets of the many people who have died because of their actions, the sadness of the people who mourned for those deaths, all these feelings still remain in my heart, this is the price they should pay for.”

However, Emi knew very well that these things no longer provided enough fuel for the fire of hatred to continue burning in her heart.

“I have thought about this many times before. It is rather meaningless to make these assumptions, but while the Demon King and the others did nothing, the conflict between the humans of Ente Isla had never stopped. It’s the same on Earth as well, right? Japan is more peaceful, but the world is always filled with small and large conflicts, and there are lives being lost every day. For my situation, the invader happened to be the Demon King, and I had the power to fight against them. I was almost killed a few times, but I took many lives as well. In the end, I came to this country. In this country, girls who are the same age as me do not know the fear of possibly dying tomorrow, living a peaceful life. I felt envious of this. However, no matter how much envy I feel, I am unable to make

it such that my past is the same as theirs. Most importantly.....”

Emi grasped Rika’s hand which was placed on the table.

“I made friends with Rika in this country. I do not wish to view the time I spent here as the result of a twisted life. Even if I have a chance to start my life over, I do not wish to choose a life where I am unable to meet Rika.”

“Emi.....”

Looking at her hand which was being grabbed, Rika blushed again.

“Y-you seem to view me very highly, but I-I’m not such an amazing person.”

“I will be the one who decides what kind of person you are to me. You’re an indispensable important friend in my life.”

Emi said this directly to the flustered Rika.

“Ugh~~ wait, this makes me feel troubled for a different reason than before. If you view me too highly, Emerada-chan might get jealous later!”

“That’s true. But originally, Emerada’s position is so high up that I shouldn’t have an opportunity to speak to her directly in the first place. To be able to joke and laugh with her without any status barriers is also a result of my life. She may look like that, but she’s a very reliable older sister.”

“I’m sorry, I still cannot accept the fact that she is older than you.”

“Do I really look that mature? It happened a long time ago, but Chiho-chan also felt shocked about my age.”

“Emerada looking too young is also one of the factors, and I feel bad saying this, but the reason why Emi feels mature to others is probably because of your hard life in the past. Even now, I still do not think that you’re younger than me. You do occasionally exhibit behaviour which matches your age when it’s just the two of us, but in the eyes of others, you probably give the impression of being as mature as the MgRonalds shop manager.”

“As a female, hearing someone say that I am like Kisaki-san makes me happy.”

Emi let go of Rika’s hand with a smile.

“Back to the original topic, you don’t have to be concerned about my issues,

just follow your feelings and do what you want.”

“Now that you mentioned it, we were talking about that. But, I can only be this honest because I am talking to you. If the other party is him instead, I might just retreat without doing anything?”

“Then let’s just see how it will turn out during that time. That is also your choice. Doing nothing in the end even if you wanted to confess. It’s actually not that uncommon.”

“It~ is~ so~ embarrassing~ stop it~~~!”

Rika covered her face with both hands and became agitated once more.

“It feels like I am just repeating myself and I am not really in the position to say this, but it’s amazing that you’re this open minded. He is your enemy like you said.”

“Didn’t I say so already? I have gone through that stage.”

The reaction of ‘that girl’ was surprisingly resolute, and what Emi was thinking at that time solidified to a steadfast thought in her mind.

That would be Maou, Ashiya, and Urushihara are enemies of the humans of Ente Isla, but this had nothing to do with the people of Japan and Earth.

Because there was no relation, it was natural that there would be people who love them, because there was no relation, there was no need to hesitate when there was really a need to sentence them.

“Saying that you had already gone through that stage, are you referring to Chiho-chan?”

“Depending on the situation, Chiho-chan might be mentally stronger than us right now, but the foundation of her thoughts is still the same as any other girl her age. At that time, Chiho-chan knew the truth about the Demon King and me without having anyone to discuss with or having anyone to protect her, so she must have felt troubled for a long time.”

“Of course she would get a huge shock. You’re talking about that incident, right? Urushihara-san was still Maou-san’s enemy, and you ended up injuring your legs in order to save Chiho-chan when she almost got crushed by the

highway.”

Rika recalled what she had heard from Chiho when Emi was captured in Ente Isla.

“Sigh, it was something like that. Being thrown into that environment resembling that of a movie with special effects all by herself, and no one else besides her remembered what happened as well. It should have been very terrifying.”

“Hm? What do you mean? No one else remembered?” Rika asked in confusion.

Emi pointed at her own temple and replied, “You should understand if I described it as memory manipulation right? The Demon King, Bell, and I can manipulate the memories of other people to a certain extent.”

“Huh?”

Rika’s eyes widened in surprise.

“What, is it that magic like thing from before?”

“The Demon King uses demonic magic. We use spells. Strictly speaking, these are completely different techniques, but it would feel the same for the person whose memory was being manipulated. Rika, you’ve probably never heard of this before? The collapse of the Shuto Expressway would be a huge incident that would spread around for the next five or ten years. The Demon King set up a barrier during the battle so those outside would not see what is happening within and erased the memories of what happened during that period from the people who were inside the barrier. It sounds simple, but this is something which can only be done by the Demon King. If it was Suzuno or me, we would spend a lot of effort just to erase the memory of one person.”

“W-why do I feel that I have just heard something very scary.....”

“I lied to Rika about my background, but I swear that I definitely have not manipulated your memory.”

“Ah, yeah, now that I think about it, the first time I heard about the matters related to Ente Isla, Maou-san had told me that ‘he could erase the terrifying

memories'. Because there were too many shocking things that happened at that time, I just thought, so such things can be done as well. But now that I calmly recall this, it's really scary. However, wouldn't this be abused in Ente Isla like during crime investigations or something?"

"Hm~ I wonder how it is. I heard that there are ways to dispel them, so just from the spell aspect, it should be unable to completely remove memories. I have only learned the basics, so I'm not too sure about this, Bell would probably....."

"Uh, it would be useless even if I knew the details, so let's forget about that. However, this still feels rather strange."

Rika said this after she noticed something.

Emi knew what it was, but she still intentionally asked, "Which part is strange?"

"That would be Maou-san allowing only Chiho-chan's memories to remain intact."

".....That's true."

Emi nodded deeply.

"Maou-san cherishes Chiho-chan a lot, right? Saying this is a little weird, but I was so frightened by that guy called Gabriel that I got a high fever and was confined to bed although I was unharmed. I was even deeply traumatised. Normal people should not be able to overcome the fear of being so near death that easily....."

"And Chiho-chan also saw their demon forms."

"Simply put, demon forms are the true forms of Maou-san and the rest? Erhm..... I have never seen them before, but do they look like monsters after all?"

"It depends on the definition of monster, but it's hard to say if it would be an appearance a normal high school girl would not want to interact with. Do you really want to know the details?"

".....For the sake of the future."

Rika suddenly showed a serious expression and nodded. She was bothered by the true form of the person she had a crush on after all.

"Lucifer, or Urushihara, has the least change in appearance. It's roughly like his current appearance with only an addition of huge black wings."

"Ah, it's not that different?"

Rika relaxed momentarily, Emi shook her head.

"Alsiel, which is also Ashiya's demon form, has two scorpion-like tails."

"T-tails?"

More accurately, it was one tail which split into two tails, but Emi was unclear about the structure of a demon's rear end, so she just described what she had seen.

"His skin is like a prawn shell made of metal which cannot be pierced by a sword. It has a sturdy structure and that skin covers everything, including the face, hands, and body. His usual voice is very ear splitting. If you just look at his silhouette, the main parts can still be considered as similar to a human's, but his height is still slightly taller than his current height. As for his legs hidden under his clothes, because I never had a good look at it, I'm not too clear about it."

"P-prawn....."

It seemed like Rika was unable to imagine it properly.

Only an image of a lobster head, which was placed in the middle of New Year cuisine, connected to Ashiya's head appeared in her mind.

"It's hard to imagine it."

"Sigh, when compared to humans, the Demon King would resemble a human more than Ashiya."

"Ah, is, is that so?"

"Yeah, but the Demon King's height is close to 3 meters, and his limbs are as thick as a tree trunk. In addition, his feet are hooves, has horns on his head. He also has wings which can appear and disappear at his will."

Can this be considered similar to a human? Rika, who gave up on

understanding this, showed an expression of surprise.

“Why can he make his wings appear and disappear at will?”

“I don’t know. He could have formed them with demonic magic, or he could have had them from the start. But he seems to be able to fly even without wings, so I don’t really know what they are for.”

“You didn’t exaggerate anything, did you?”

“How am I supposed to exaggerate this?”

Rika had never seen their forms before, so it was natural for her to feel this way, but what Emi said was all the truth.

“Sigh..... it’s so hard to imagine.”

“Even if you said that you wanted to see, they probably would not agree so easily, and if proper preparations were not made, Rika might die, so it might be difficult.”

“Eh, why would I die?”

“Being exposed to large amounts of demonic magic is life threatening to normal humans. They are all high level demons, so they seem to be able to stop their demonic magic from leaking out to some extent, but we have to play it safe and there are no guarantees that there won’t be any after effects.”

“.....”

This time, Rika’s face really froze.

“Of course there is no need to worry about this now. Even without demonic magic, they are able to maintain their lives by eating. Ashiya seemed to have intentionally emptied his demonic magic, so there won’t be any danger even if you go close to him or touch him.”

“It’s not like he’s a poisonous spider.....”

“Based on my knowledge, it’s actually quite close to that.”

It seemed like the more Emi spoke the truth, the more she was demeaning the person her friend liked. Emi said this with a slightly raised voice.

“It seems like this road is harder to walk on than a road of thorns.”

"P-perhaps so."

Emi agreed as well.

"But before me, someone had already walked on this path, right?"

"If that child was born in Ente Isla, she would definitely become a great person."

"She's already amazing right now. Before I knew about all this, she had been harbouring everyone's secrets by herself. I don't think I would be able to do it."

"Yeah..... that's true."

Rika and Chiho had been dragged into danger because of the affairs of Ente Isla, and knew about the true identities of Emi and the others in the end.

However, the care Chiho and Rika received after knowing the truth was very different.

When Rika was attacked by Gabriel and the knights from the Eastern Continent of Ente Isla who had come to kidnap Ashiya, Ooguro Amane came to save her immediately.

After that, just like what Rika had said, she got a fever and was confined to bed. During that time, Chiho visited her frequently, and under Chiho's lead, Maou, Suzuno, Urushihara, and Amane also individually showed concern for Rika.

But what about Chiho?

At that time, Suzuno and Amane were not around. In addition, Emi and Ashiya had not built deep relations with Chiho.

Being kidnapped by Lucifer and Olba under these conditions, being dragged into a supernatural battle, then forced to face the fact that the senior whom she trusted and had a crush on was actually the Demon King from a foreign world.

Other than herself, no one had memories of what had happened. It was not difficult to imagine that she was struggling between her feelings for her senior as well as the memories of the battle.

Her troubles seemed to have been swept clean on the day she became close friends with Emi, but in the end she still spent a lot of time so she would be able to talk to Maou like before.

"Chiho-chan might be acting like it is a small issue, but she must have suffered a lot. No, she might still be suffering now."

Chiho knew the truth about Maou, as well as his true form, though she had experienced life threatening dangers a few times, she still planned to dig deeper into the truth, and regardless what kind of result she was faced with in the end, she probably would never warp her way of thinking.

"Can I ask a rather sharp question?"

"What question?" Emi asked in confusion.

Rika said with a serious expression, "Emi's father, married an angel, right?"

".....Yes."

The reason why Emi hesitated was because she had never said that Lailah was her 'Mother', but Rika was not bothered by this and continued to speak, "Then were there humans who had a relationship with demons before?"

That was a sharp question.

However, to people who knew about the situation of Emi's parents, it was not that strange to think of this kind of question.

To this, Emi had a very clear answer.

"I don't know."

That was Devil's Proof.

Humans and angels can live their lives together.

Then how about humans and demons?

".....Even if we talk more about this now, there's no way to confirm this."

Rika nodded with a smile.

"Thank you, Emi. Thank you for discussing with me until this late."

When they looked up, the clock in the shop was showing that it was close to

midnight.

“Please don’t mind, I have not eaten with you in a long time, so I’m very happy. Will you be able to catch the last train?”

“I have checked the train schedule beforehand, so it’s fine on my end, but didn’t you ask Suzuno-chan to help take care of Alas=Ramus-chan? If you return too late, it might trouble Suzuno-chan and Alas=Ramus.”

“I told them about this earlier, so it would be fine. But thanks for your concern. In addition, I forgot the most key thing, when do you plan to ‘decide your victory’?”

“Tomorrow afternoon.”

“That’s fast.”

“Because the both of us are only free tomorrow. That’s why I was so anxious to find you. Heh heh heh.”

Rika laughed in embarrassment.

“I see. I just said that I am unable to cheer for you, but I’m going to say ‘good luck’ anyway.”

“Honestly, from the current situation, I have no idea what kind of result will be the best one.”

Rika, who had stood up to prepare to return, picked up the bill, but Emi stopped her.

“I’ll pay for what I ate.”

“Uh, you can’t do that.”

“I won’t back off on this. If we trace today’s happenings to their roots, the one who should be treating is me. So let’s just pay for our own share as usual.”

“.....I can’t win against that reasoning of yours.”

Once Emi emphasised that she wanted it to be the same as usual, Rika raised her hands in surrender.

After saying goodbye to Rika in front of Sasazuka station, Emi walked towards Villa Rosa Sasazuka alone.

Honestly, she felt that the possibility of Rika's feelings reaching Ashiya was very low.

Unlike Maou, Ashiya always kept a certain distance between him and humans, this was the impression Emi had of him.

He did not hanker after humans like Maou and did not welcome humans as much as Maou. Even so, unlike before, he no longer viewed all humans as enemies.

"So if everything went well, I would be very surprised."

Seeing the white breath she exhaled dissipate into the air under the street light, Emi hastened her steps.

Someone was waiting for her at Villa Rosa Sasazuka.

At the apartment where the enemies she should eliminate lived, there was someone she loved and an important friend. The amount of time which had passed since she started living this kind of life—going to and from Villa Rosa Sasazuka and working in the same place as her enemy and friend—was only a little more than one month.

It would be good if this complex and strange indescribable situation, if this world which was so unbelievably comfortable, could continue forever.

The illumination of the street lights, the car lights and the lights from the convenience store, Emi walked under these lights which had flowed out from the many people who were going about their lives and thought thus.

In front of this road which Emi was already used to walking on, she could see the lights of the apartment.

From how the lights of the rooms on the second floor were still turned on, Emi figured that Maou and Suzuno were still awake.

Since when did it start to feel this way? Once she saw those lights, Emi would feel herself relaxing.

"This is bad, I shouldn't be feeling this way."

Could it be that her mental state was malfunctioning again because she had just said those things to Rika?

".....Hmm?"

Were her eyes malfunctioning as well? When Emi looked towards the apartment, she discovered a strange thing next to it.

Someone was hugging their knees and sitting on the public staircase.

And there were two of them.

When she recognised who they were, Emi hid behind the outer wall of the apartment on reflex.

"Emi should have left work already, what is she doing....."

"Bell-san said something about her meeting a friend....."

It was Maou and Lailah.

The weather was so cold, why were the two of them curling up and shivering in that kind of place?

"Friend? Is it Suzuki Rika?"

"I don't know who it was, I only heard that this person suddenly went to the store to find her....."

"Then I should be correct. It's Suzuki Rika. She comes to the store frequently."

"I don't know her, but is that person Emilia's friend?"

"Yeah. She is someone from Earth, but she knows our true identities. She seems to be Emi's best friend, so she probably knows about you as well."

"Is that so? It's good to have a friend whom you can talk about everything with."

"But there's no need to choose today, right? Because of Suzuno, we can't return to our rooms before Emi returns. If the person who came to find her was Suzuki Rika, who knows what time she will return."

Lailah might have been there because she wanted to discuss with Emi about

the topic from before, but why was Maou there as well?

The interactions between the two of them might have been very different from before, but it was still impossible for Maou to brave this cold and go outside to wait for Emi to come back.

Then again, when Suzuno was talking over the phone earlier, she seemed to be lecturing someone who was possibly Maou, could it be related to this?

However, no matter what Suzuno said, Emi did not think that Ashiya would allow Suzuno to chase Maou outdoors in this cold weather.

Just as Emi was thinking about these things—

“I haven’t done this in a long time.”

She remembered that she used to frequently go to Villa Rosa Sasazuka by herself to investigate the situation.

Ever since Alas=Ramus had appeared, Emi started to openly step into the premises. It did not happen that long ago, but she suddenly felt nostalgic about it.

“I think that I have at least showed my concern.....”

“From a woman’s point of view, what the man ‘thinks’ are all excuses. Didn’t the results end up like that? No matter how many effective strategies you used, it would be meaningless if there were no results.”

“I don’t want to hear that from you.”

“I’m sorry, but I’m speaking the truth. I have seen many types of people from many countries over the years. The strange thing is, everyone quarrels because of similar reasons.”

“We didn’t quarrel.”

“From how both sides would be able to communicate, quarrelling is considered better.”

“What do you mean?”

This topic appeared rather intimate for a conversation between a Demon King and an Archangel, but it seemed like Maou had angered some female.

Who did he offend to end up in this situation?

It should not have been Lailah who was currently in front of him. Emi had not met Maou today as well.

Suzuno did sound rather unhappy when she picked up the phone, but if he only offended Suzuno, Ashiya would not tolerate her chasing Maou out of the house.

With that, the only females left who Maou could have angered were Amane, Acies, or the Landlady.

Considering that Maou and Ashiya were unable to go against the Landlady of Villa Rosa Sasazuka, the most possible situation was that Maou had been lectured by Shiba Miki because of some incident, so Ashiya could only hold back his tears as he watched Maou getting chased out. However, the conversation progressed in a direction which Emi did not expect.

“Because from what I heard, you were one-sidedly depending on her.”

Lailah said with a sigh.

“Depending on..... uh, it might be like that, but the both of us should know that this cannot be handled with just normal feelings.....”

Maou tried to rebuke, but his voice lacked conviction.

It was not because it was shaking from the cold. It felt like he knew that his words would not make sense, but he still had to say it.

“That ‘the other party should know’ is being dependent. There might be no other choice at that time, but there might be feelings of dissatisfaction or uneasiness over time, this kind of thing is common, right?”

“That..... is true. But even if you say that, I can’t make any decisions now.”

“Even if you can’t make any decisions, you should work hard towards that, right? Have you shown her your efforts? Did you take your time in showing your sincerity because you predicted that she would respect your wishes and could understand everything about you?”

“.....”

Perhaps Lailah had hit the nail on the head, Maou fell silent.

"Seriously, that child's tolerance and mental state are at abnormal levels, but she is still a high school girl! She only has seventeen years of life experience! You shouldn't assume that she would have the same thoughts as you, a demon who has lived for a few hundred years."

"You're right..... I know that..... uuuu, it's cold, why isn't Emi back yet....."

Emi could not help but suck in a breath.

There was only one 'high school girl' who would fit in that conversation between Maou and Lailah.

That would be Chiho.

Did Maou make Chiho unhappy?

"The harsh truth is that 'sinful men' within television dramas and movies don't get forgiven even if they are handsome, rich, or have a high standing in society. Since they can't be forgiven in dramas, that means that they definitely will not be forgiven in real life."

"You shouldn't reference television dramas or movies. Your husband will cry."

"That person likes period dramas as well, so it's fine. By the way, in period dramas, those playboys who toy with women would end up being killed by gangsters or evil officials before the final episode even if they righted their ways later on in the series. Examples of these are rather common."

"I don't understand what you're talking about anymore."

"It means that a man who hurts a cute girl will definitely get retribution many times worse in severity."

Emi could not help but strongly agree with Lailah's analysis of period dramas, then immediately came to her senses.

It seemed like Maou had definitely hurt Chiho.

From how Suzuno acted over the phone, Ashiya had also agreed to chasing Maou out of the apartment.

Suzuno cherished Chiho a lot, Ashiya also saw Chiho as someone worth

respecting and treated Chiho more politely than how he treated Urushihara.

However, it was a fact that the Maou Emi knew would not hurt Chiho.

Just like how it was confirmed from the conversation with Rika just now, Maou had given Chiho special treatment from the beginning.

After Emi had started working at MgRonalds, she also heard snippets from Kisaki, Akiko, and Kawada about Maou's attitude towards Chiho, and whether it was before or after Chiho knew of their true identities, his attitude had not changed at all.

"Is Chiho-chan..... alright?"

If the situation permitted it, Emi really wanted to leave the two of them in the cold and go to Chiho who had been hurt by Maou to hug her tightly.

However, it was past midnight right now, visiting suddenly at this time would be too strange.

In addition, knowing Chiho, it felt like she would not say bad things about Maou even if he had treated her badly.

In the end, what did Maou do to Chiho?

The conversation she had heard so far had not touched on anything concrete.

"However, she's really mentally strong, huh. It reminds me of my past self."

"If you continue to voice your delusions, I'm going to kick you down from behind."

"This childlike response of yours is quite nice too, how pure..... kyah?"

"?"

Hearing Lailah's scream caused Emi to look out from behind the wall to investigate, then she discovered that Lailah was leaning on the railing of the staircase in an unnatural manner and breathing heavily.

It seemed like Maou had truly intended to kick Lailah down the stairs.

"T-there's no need to really kick me right! Wouldn't it be dangerous if I really fell down the stairs?"

"For it to be settled just like this after an angel messed around with the Demon King, you should be thanking me instead. And your daughter had already fallen down these stairs a few times already, I was increasing the common points between the two of you."

Maou's messed up logic caused Lailah to ask in surprise, "D-Did you push Emilia down?"

"She fell down herself. I even saved her once. Thank me."

Thinking about it, that had happened before.

She no longer missed a step on the stairs in recent times, but that was only because she had started coming here more frequently.

As Emi became closer to the residents on the second floor of Villa Rosa Sasazuka, she no longer feared these stairs.

Maou slowly exhaled the sigh which was rising in his throat through his nose so Lailah would not notice.

"Then, what do you plan to do?"

".....I'm still thinking about it."

"I have no right to say this, but this kind of problem will only become harder to handle if you drag it out."

"I really don't want to be told this by you the most. Hurry up and reconcile with your daughter."

"Aren't I waiting for her outside for the sake of doing so?"

"Let me say this first, you had better not act like you're doing her a favour. Emi's stubbornness is not normal. If you make her unhappy, she will be more cold-hearted than me."

"Is, is that so?"

".....Who are you calling cold-hearted?"

Just as Lailah's tone became stiff, Emi frowned and complained in a place which they could not see.

"She did lead a hard life after all, so she won't trust people easily. Not

considering Chi-chan and Suzuki Rika, towards Suzuno, who has such a good relationship with her right now, Emi had shown such a wary attitude at the beginning that Suzuno was forced to give up on that.”

“.....But there aren’t any signs of that right now.”

“That is now. You only know things about Emi from when she was just born and in recent times, right?”

“Aren’t you about the same as me?!”

“At least I still have the advantage of the past one year. After all, we always end up gathering together for no rhyme or reason.”

“.....What do you mean by no reason?”

Emi’s frown deepened further.

“She hates unreasonable things the most, even if it can be explained, she will end up acting based on her emotions once she is unable to accept it and will become violent immediately. In addition, she can’t take shocks too well, so she will become easily depressed because of some meaningless things, I can’t stand it.”

Emi could not see Maou’s expression due to being behind the wall, but he must have been seriously complaining with a frown.

However, although someone was saying bad things about her behind her back without any restraint, Emi strangely did not feel angry.

“.....What.”

Replacing that feeling was the thought ‘there’s no need to phrase it so negatively’, and that thought lightly surfaced in Emi’s heart like a curry stain on a white handkerchief which could not be cleaned off easily.

“Hmm~”

On the other hand, it was the enemy of humans saying bad things about her daughter, but Lailah acted like she had no interest in it.

Emi felt angrier about this instead.

These complex feelings originated from her position as the daughter, but

because Emi did not want to acknowledge this, she silently tolerated this.

“With regards to Alas=Ramus, she really handled it very well on her own. However, over the holidays, Emi still came over like it was a natural thing to do even though she had frequently said that I am a bad influence to Alas=Ramus. Even so, Alas=Ramus feels happier with this, and it will be easier on Emi.”

“Oh..... I see.”

“Hey, what kind of attitude is this..... eh? Why are we discussing about this?”

Lailah showed a disinterested attitude, and Maou came to his senses because of this.

“We were talking how it won’t be that easy for me and Emilia to reconcile.”

“Ah, that’s right, that’s right.”

Maou had grasped the situation, but he continued to stay silent after losing his momentum.

To avoid getting bad mouthed further, and to stop the stain on the white handkerchief in her heart from spreading further, when Emi thought that it was about time to appear—

“You understand Emilia well, huh.”

—Lailah’s sentence caused Emi to stay where she was.

“.....Huh? What are you talking about.....”

“What Emilia likes, what she hates, what she is normally thinking, you have talked about all of them. That’s because you have been observing Emilia closely, right?”

“.....Ugh.”

Emi sucked in a breath, and felt her face heat up at the same time.

Emi could not hide the confusion she was feeling at all, and sat on the ground although she was well hidden.

“What, is wrong with me, right now.....”

“You’re saying things which can be easily misunderstood again.....”

"There's only you and me here, who else is here to misunderstand this? When you quarrelled with Gabriel before, you also considered Emilia's feelings and worried about her, right?"

"Don't talk about the events from that time."

Maou's voice was a little slurred. He was probably grabbing his own head and feeling troubled about it.

"It's nothing to feel embarrassed about."

"I'm not embarrassed. And rather than saying I am observing her closely, it's more like I have no choice but to do so! Not considering recent events, it would be normal for me to be killed by her anytime. If I do not pay close attention to her every move, my head might just fly off."

"But, you were still watching, right?"

"Don't forcefully steer the conversation in that direction!"

"Then, because of that, you did not pay attention to Chiho, who had been providing you with a comfortable environment."

"....."

"Eh.....?"

Lailah mentioned Chiho at an unexpected moment, causing Maou to fall silent. Emi also widened her eyes in surprise.

Maou had not been paying attention to Chiho?

"You fell silent just from this, how honest."

".....Weren't you the one who told me that whatever I am thinking is only an excuse?"

"That is correct."

Emi felt as if Lailah had shown a wry smile.

"Even if I wanted to make excuses, it would be meaningless to tell you. If I don't explain it properly to Ashiya and Suzuno, or even Chi-chan, I will be unable to return home. In addition, being chased out of the house is bad enough, why do I have to wait until Emi returns to be able to go back home?"

"It could be because the timings match up, or because of other motives. Regardless, it's not like you can go to Chiho-san's house and disturb them, right?"

"If I do something idiotic, it might cause Chi-chan's parents to think worse of her."

"You are able to think so clearly on these matters, so why are you this careless when it comes to areas which are easy to understand?"

"About that part, it's probably like what Suzuno, Ashiya, and you said, I am finding excuses and relying on her."

"Perhaps."

"Sigh..... anyway, come back soon, Emi..... else I might really catch a cold."

Maou and Lailah ended their conversation and the apartment was covered in silence.

In the end, after eavesdropping in the cold for a period of time, all Emi knew was that before she returned, Maou seemed to have lapsed in his concern towards Chiho, and had been chased out of the house.

On the other hand, Lailah had mentioned that compared to Chiho, Maou seemed to understand Emi better.

Because of that, Maou had made Chiho unhappy.

".....Is, is it a good or bad thing that I have heard about this?"

Emi roughly understood the situation.

And because she understood this, Emi's heart grew anxious.

Emi did not know what Maou had said, perhaps his words and actions caused Chiho to think this way.

However, one thing could be confirmed.

Chiho felt jealous of what was happening between Maou and Emi.

"W-what should I do....."

It could not be helped that Chiho had developed such feelings.

Even if Emi started wavering because of Lailah's sudden appearance and the commotion Iron caused, she had been recently relying on Maou's kindness with excuses such as malfunctions and so on.

"Wait, I can't jump to conclusions yet. I should ask Bell about the situation first, and apologise to Chiho for causing her to misunderstand....."

If it was in the past, Emi would probably say that she was just making use of Maou. However, it was different now.

She was truly acting needy with Maou.

Not only did she allow herself to do so, she was doing so in a proactive manner.

And Chiho had sensed this.

"H-how do I describe such a situation? Something like after spending a long time with the bad person, then, uh, it's a name of a city in some country....."

Emi's hand which had reached into her bag to pull out her Slimphone was shaking.

Her fingertips were too dry and the screen could not respond well.

"Ah!"

Emi's hand slipped and her Slimphone dropped onto the tarmac.

Maou and Lailah did not seem to notice the sound, but Emi was unable to suppress the wavering in her heart.

If she continued to stay here, her thoughts would lose control in an unbelievable direction.

She had worked for a long time today, then discussed serious things with Rika, it must have been because her brain was too tired.

If Emi did not think so, she would not be able to stand up once more.

After picking up the Slimphone with slow movements, Emi stepped away from the wall with shaky steps and walked towards the entrance of the apartment.

Then—

“Ah! Emi! You’re finally back!”

“Eh? Ah, E-Emilia, wel-welcome back..... kya!”

“Where did you go?! Why did you come back from that direction?!”

Maou pushed away Lailah, who had a stiff expression from not knowing how to act around Emi, and rushed down the stairs.

“.....What are the both of you doing here?”

Emi did not answer Maou’s question, and suppressing her volume with all her might, she asked a question in return.

“Uh, doing what, anyway before you return, I can’t go back inside! Go and look for Suzuno quickly! I’m going to freeze to death! Ashiya! Suzuno! Emi is back! She’s already back, so please let me in!”

“Ah! Wait a moment.....!”

Maou grabbed Emi’s hand, and unable to shake the hand away, Emi was pulled up the stairs just like that.

After brushing past the dazed Lailah, Emi was pulled into the common corridor.

Ashiya and Suzuno rolled their eyes at the same time, looked out from Room 201 and Room 202 respectively to glare at Maou who was making a lot of noise, and the latter went into Room 201 while shivering.

It was rude of Maou to act that way without providing any explanation, but the fact that Emi did not resist during the whole time she was pulled to this position caused the person herself to feel troubled, shaken, and stunned.

Suzuno glared at Maou unhappily and it was only after he disappeared into Room 201 completely did she turn to Emi and say, “Alas=Ramus is already asleep, so we have to be quiet. And Lailah should be outside right, have you talked with her?”

“.....Ah, yeah. Bell, I’m back.....”

Emi responded to Suzuno without answering the question.

“Hm? O-oh. Welcome back. Then if both of you have finished talking, I wish to

talk to you about Chiho-dono for a while. I'm sorry, doing this although you're already very tired, I'm going to brew tea, please give me some time.....”

“Emilia? Erhm, pardon me, coming to find you when you just got off work and feel tired, sorry, erhm, I have something to ask you..... Bell-san, I'm sorry, I'm not done yet.”

At this moment, Lailah looked in from the porch at the common corridor to find out what the two of them were doing.

“What's wrong, are the two of you not done talking?”

““This is not the time to talk about this.””

The voices of both mother and daughter overlapped coincidentally.

“Hm? What's wrong?”

“Ah, it's nothing. Erhm, what's wrong with Chiho-chan.....”

“In terms of priority, Lailah should be the first one. Lailah, kindly finish speaking first.”

“Y-yeah. Actually, Emilia..... Emilia?”

Though Suzuno and Lailah were speaking to her, Emi still appeared distracted. The two of them were confused, but still continued to speak.

“I'm listening.”

“I-I see. Actually, erhm, the day after tomorrow, Satan and Chiho-san are coming to my..... home in Tokyo..... I hope you can come along too.”

“.....Home? The Demon King and Chiho-chan?”

“T-that's right. I heard that you, Satan and Chiho-san don't have work after evening, so please come.....erhm, let's ask your father to come too. Is, is that alright. If you don't mind, Emerada-san and Bell-san can come too.”

“I see.....”

Lailah spoke agitatedly with much effort, and Emi replied vaguely, making it difficult to tell if she was listening at all.

“As for Alsiel-san and Lucifer, they don't have other plans, but they don't

seem to be willing to come..... erhm, with regards to the vague or insincere things which have happened up to now, I will explain properly, and I have something to give to you as well.....”

Ashiya had no plans the day after tomorrow?

The information which Emi gleaned from what Lailah had said was obviously different from the main topic.

The day after her good friend who said that she liked Ashiya was going to determine her victory after understanding everything.

Ashiya was going to stay at the apartment, and did not make any special plans.

Rika's feelings.

Chiho's feelings.

Her own feelings.

The human heart which seemed visible but was actually not visible at all.

It was a setback large enough to change their lives, but it would not make any impact on the world. Almost losing herself in the waves of feelings passed on since ancient times—

“Do whatever you want. I’m not interested.”

When Emi came to her senses, she had already replied thus.

“Eh.....”

“Emilia, is that really alright?”

Emi’s response caused Lailah to become speechless like she had received a huge shock, and Suzuno could not help but confirm with her again.

“Nothing much will change even if I go, what you want me to do will not change, right?”

“B-But I want to show you my sincerity. I have been acting as I pleased and have been hard to track, but in order to prove to all of you that I will no longer do so.....”

"It's fine as long as you possess this determination to do so. If the Demon King and Chiho-chan can acknowledge this, there's nothing bad about that. However, for me, even after seeing the place you are staying in, I won't get anything good out of it."

"P-perhaps you are right about that....."

"The Demon King's life is like this, and the lives Sariel and Gabriel lead here feel no different from normal Japanese. You should be about the same, right? Then I do not wish to specially go over and witness it. I'm sorry that you had to wait for me in such cold weather but I'm not going. That's all, good night."

"E-Emilia!"

"Lailah, pardon me."

Suzuno noticed that Emi had made her decision and would not waver, so she blocked Lailah's way, allowing Emi to enter the room.

After Lailah's devastated face disappeared on the other side of the porch door when it closed, Suzuno knelt next to Alas=Ramus who was sleeping in the corner of Suzuno's futon and spoke softly to Emi who was lightly stroking her daughter's hair, "Emilia..... are you alright?"

"That just now, was it the important thing Bell mentioned over the phone?"

"Y-yeah. Erhm, because the Demon King said that he did not want to go to Lailah's house before Emilia, he asked Lailah to personally invite Emilia....."

Suzuno spoke about Maou's intentions in detail.

"Is that so? Then I feel slightly bad for the Demon King. It's rare for him to show concern for my sake."

"Uh, hm?"

Emi did not feel bad for Lailah, but felt bad for Maou. Suzuno felt that it was rather strange, but she noticed that it was not a good idea to continue talking about Lailah, so she raised her volume slightly and changed the topic.

"T-then. Wasn't the Demon King chased out? I had planned to leave him outside for the whole night, but Alsiel kept wanting me to compromise to until Emilia returns, so I had no choice but to agree. I actually met up with Chiho-

dono in the evening.....”

“The Demon King would definitely not cherish me more than Chiho-chan, you know.”

“That damn Demon King, actually making use of Chiho-dono’s good intentions, causing Chiho-dono to..... what?”

“The Demon King does not particularly cherish me.”

“E-Emilia?” Suzuno asked in a stunned manner, “Did the Demon King say something? Or did you meet Chiho-dono somewhere.....?”

“It’s neither.”

Emi continued to stroke Alas=Ramus’s hair with a calm expression.

“Actually, the Demon King is kind to anyone. He even sees me as a comrade although I want to kill him. He’s just been more caring towards me recently because I was dragged into trouble and changed environments. To the Demon King, I did not become ‘special’ because of this.”

“Emilia..... did something happen?”

“The evidence is, the Demon King is kind to Lailah too, right? He keeps complaining about Lailah, but still patiently waited for Lailah to think of a suitable method. He even thought of such troublesome negotiation conditions so Lailah and I could reconcile.”

Alas=Ramus, who was being patted, rolled over and left Emi’s hand. Emi’s hand stopped in the air just like this.

“Hey, Bell. The only one who the Demon King will truly want to cherish..... and want to interact with on equal terms, is Chiho-chan. What do you think I should do so Chiho-chan can understand this?”

“T-that is.....”

Suzuno momentarily became speechless.

“Does the Demon King have to take action personally after all?”

“T-that, about that, Alsiel and I have already lectured the Demon King today.....”

"That's true. Thinking about it carefully, the Demon King appears to cherish Chiho-chan a lot, but the one who was being cherished the whole time is him."

"Y-yeah, so....."

"So he wishes to be cherished after all."

"Eh?"

".....Not today. Because I have just finished talking about many complicated topics, I am thinking of strange things."

Emi lowered her hand which had stopped in midair and sighed.

"Hey, Bell. I shouldn't say such things, but I really need to rant to someone. This is also for the sake of sorting out my feelings, I hope you can keep a secret after listening to everything."

"Y-yeah."

Suzuno replied softly while still standing.

"When Lailah invited me to her home, do you know what was my first thought?"

Suzuno was unable to answer.

Because no matter how she thought about it, it did not feel like the correct answer.

And what Emi said next was truly what Suzuno did not expect.

"The Demon King, had not even gone to the home of his enemy..... the home of Hero Emilia. But he wanted to go to Lailah's home, don't you think that's such a joke?"

"Emilia..... could you be..."

".....Hey, with this, do you know how chaotic my thoughts are now?"

Emi looked up at Suzuno with a haggard face.

"I don't understand. I have tried to seriously think about many possibilities, and I was not hiding anything or trying to brush anything aside. This is obviously different. Even so, I had such a thought. That guy had never come to my home."

With my mental state like this, I really cannot discuss anything with you. The current me will just agitate Chiho-chan by meeting up with her. So I will not be going on the day after tomorrow. If I go to such a place in such a weak state, it feels like I will finish listening to what Lailah has to say little by little just to avoid Chiho-chan and the Demon King..... I'm strange after all, right?"

".....You're not strange at all."

Suzuno knelt in front of Emi and warmly hugged her shoulders tightly.

"Whether it's Emilia or me, the changes in our surrounding environment are simply too huge, and all this happened in the short time after we came to this country. Adjustment time is needed."

"Bell.....?"

"Adjustment time is needed."

Suzuno softly repeated this in Emi's ear.

"Chiho-dono cried after thinking about Emilia. She was angry at herself for feeling jealous over such small things, being unable to suppress her feelings, and was even apologising about feeling jealous while still crying. We have all forgotten that in Chiho-dono's surrounding environment, huge changes were also happening in a short amount of time. This is because of the strength of will displayed by Chiho-dono."

And the reason for Chiho being able to maintain her strength of will was something which could not be easily grasped by Emi and Suzuno.

A certain conviction in Chiho's heart was supporting her.

Depending on that conviction, Chiho lived her life together with inhabitants possessing overwhelming power from another world.

Chiho made effort to make everyone share their thoughts with one another, cherish the parts which they did not have in common, tried her best not to become a burden, and hoped that she could continue being friends with Emi, Ashiya, Urushihara, and Suzuno, these were all her thoughts.

The foundation for all of this was her conviction in her feelings for Maou.

"Everyone is still not used to this change. Truly, there is a wall known as

another world and power between us and Chiho-dono, and only Chiho-dono can see that wall. And the one who can move that away.....”

“Is the Demon King.....? Seriously..... what a joke.”

“After that wall is moved away, Chiho-dono and us can stand on the same platform. And if during that instant, only Chiho-dono holds ‘conviction’ towards her own feelings.”

Suzuno looked away from Emi.

“I will congratulate Chiho-dono.”

“Then if there are other ‘convictions’ on that platform?”

“At that time.....” Suzuno said with a smile, “we will definitely become true friends without any barriers between us.”

With her back leaning against the wall of Suzuno’s room, Lailah sat on the floor of the common corridor.

“Emilia.....”

She mumbled softly as if she was groaning, and at this moment, the door in the common corridor opened.

“Was it no good?”

Nord Justina asked Lailah worriedly.

“I know clearly in my heart that I cannot rush this.”

Lailah looked down and sighed.

“But what have I been doing with my life so far? I have lived for a few thousand years, but I don’t even know a good way to reconcile with my daughter.”

“If there really is someone who knows the way for parents to easily communicate with their children.....”

Nord knelt in front of Lailah, held her hand and pulled her on her feet.

“.....Then that person will definitely leave a mark in human history.”

A smile appeared on Nord’s usually austere expression, and the father of a daughter encouraged his wife with a smile.

“There will definitely be an opportunity in the future. Because both of you are still alive, and have successfully reunited in this peaceful world.”

“.....Yeah.”

Lailah nodded, and with Nord pulling her along, she left the second floor corridor.

“Life is unpredictable. I would never have expected that I would be staying in the same apartment as the Demon King at this age. Considering that this can happen, I feel that for a mother and a daughter who cling stubbornly to their own opinions, reconciling one day will happen naturally.”

“At that time, you should be there as well. Because the three of us are one family.”

“Yeah. That’s right..... alright, let’s head indoors. It’s cold outside.”

“Hey, dear.”

“Hmm?”

The husband and wife faced each other and chatted halfway down the staircase.

“I am truly feeling really anxious right now. It feels like this is my last chance. If I miss this chance, I have no confidence in wandering for a few hundred years again.”

“If Emilia and you are able to continue living on while maintaining your youthful appearances, then I think it’s fine.”

“I don’t want that. This does not mean that I am tired of living, but I want to become ‘human’. And I hope Emilia can maintain her identity as a ‘human’. I want to be like the countless families who exist in this world, in this universe, living while cherishing every day, then dying. Other than spending my life with

you and Emilia, I cannot imagine living any other way.”

“.....Then now is the time to bear it and wait.”

The husband held the hand of his wife and walked down the stairs carefully.

“It would be good if I could be of any help..... only at this kind of time, I really hate that I am just a normal human. If only I at least had the power to protect the both of you.”

“It was you who enabled me to become ‘human’. To me, this is already a very ample gift.”

The wife lightly kissed her husband’s cheek, and said this with a smile.

“Thank you, dear. With this, I will be able to continue working hard tomorrow without giving up.”

“Yeah.”

“And.....”

“Hmm?”

“Erhm... don’t, be too surprised about my home, okay?”

“Hm? What’s wrong? Could it be that you live in a really expensive mansion?”

“No, it’s not because of that kind of reason..... anyway, I will work hard so all of you can visit two days later.”

“I don’t really understand, but I’m looking forward to it.”

The conversation between the husband and the wife disappeared within Room 101, and shortly after, the lights of the apartment extinguished completely. By the time total silence had descended upon Sasazuka at night, it was already 2am.



THE HIGH
SCHOOL GIRL,
FINDING THE GUIDE
TO HER HEART

Chapter 3: The High School Girl, Finding the Guide to Her Heart

The bell signalling the start of lunch break rang. Within the classroom which was filled with the atmosphere of freedom, only one person sat at their desk without moving as if they were trapped there. When the echoes of the bell dissipated, that person slumped on the table so slowly that it resembled time lapse photography, then stopped moving completely.

“Hey, Yoshiya.”

“Huh?”

“Did you hear about anything?”

Tokairin Kaori, from Sasahata High School Class 2-A, whispered while sitting near the seat of Emura Yoshiya, who was her childhood friend, classmate, as well as fellow club member.

“What, about Sasaki?”

Yoshiya acutely sensed what Kaori wanted to ask, and responded with a shake of his head. Their classmate, fellow club member, and friend whom they knew since they had entered high school—Sasaki Chiho—seemed to be very listless since morning.

She seemed distracted even if she was called upon in class. When each class ended, she either slumped over on the table or wandered off to some place. Feeling concerned, Kaori has asked Chiho what had happened after third period was over, but with an obviously forced smile—

“Sorry for making you worry. I just forgot my wallet, mobile phone, planner, stationery, and two notebooks at home, so I’m really alright.”

To people who knew her well, hearing this excuse which Chiho gave would

definitely make them feel that she was not alright.

It would still be fine if she only had only forgotten her planner and stationery, but if Chiho had really forgotten to bring the rest as well, people would worry if she had lost them.

“If you have not heard about anything, then how would I know?”

“That’s true. But it seems like she doesn’t plan to eat anything.....”

“If it’s because she had forgotten her wallet, you or I just need to lend her money, but doesn’t Sasaki normally eat a bento?”

“She doesn’t eat bento everyday.”

They may have been good friends, but other than club activities, Yoshiya rarely hung out with Kaori and Chiho while in school.

At these times, girls had girl cliques and guys had guy cliques.

Chiho normally ate lunch with Kaori, and although they occasionally went to the student cafeteria to eat together with classmates they were on very good terms with, Chiho would eat bentos 70% of the time and go to the cafeteria 30% of the time.

“Bento..... bento huh.....?”

“What is it?”

“Hm~ none of your business.”

“Hey, what do you mean by none of your business?”

Kaori had initiated the conversation first, yet shut Yoshiya out almost immediately, causing him to feel disappointed.

“I am the club president after all. I should show my concern when I see a club member being depressed.”

The only second year students in the Sasahata High School Archery Club were Chiho, Kaori and Yoshiya, and after the third year students had stepped down, Emura Yoshiya became the club president, surprising everyone in the school.

Chiho was reliable and had prestige, Kaori was easygoing and was good at taking care of her juniors. Just as everyone thought that either one of them

would become the next club president, Yoshiya was unexpectedly chosen.

The reason was simply because Yoshiya had pulled his juniors in middle school into the club, causing the small Sasahata High School Archery Club to be able to gather the minimum number required to enter the five-person mixed gender competition despite their small size.

Considering that there were four guys in first year and the remaining female student was also Yoshiya's junior, Kaori suggested,

"Then we'll just have Yoshiya, who has the biggest clique, become president. The both of us will support you as the vice presidents."

Chiho agreed as well, this was something which happened in the summer.

During the Tokyo City Competition in the summer, Chiho and the others were eliminated in the quarterfinals in the group and individual competitions, but in the group competition, with Chiho as Oomae (the first competitor—Forward), and Kaori as Ochi (the fifth competitor—General), they had won up to the quarterfinals, so they had experienced very fulfilling club activities.

Then, Kaori had a thought that Chiho's bentos started changing during that summer.

From Kaori's point of view, Chiho's bentos had clearly become more luxurious.

Taking the summer competition as the boundary, Chiho's bento box was one size bigger, and the contents were clearly not frozen food, mostly consisting of dishes which required effort to make.

"Hmm."

"Tokairin?"

"Uh~ it's not like I have no idea about this at all. Before club activities start, I will think of a way to cheer her up."

"Is that so? Then I'll leave it to you!"

As long as Kaori said she would handle it, Yoshiya would basically leave it all in her hands.

The juniors had also started to realise that things would be smoother if they passed things to Chiho or Kaori to handle, but even without considering this, to describe it in a bad way, Yoshiya did not consider anything at all; to describe it in a better way, the figure who was willing to do everything would be a good influence on the club.

Compared to the troubles he had in early spring when considering his future path, Yoshiya seemed to have found himself once again and had recovered his usual cheerful disposition.

While he had been influenced by Chiho's serious attitude and proactive actions, in Kaori's opinion, it would be harder to handle Yoshiya if he did not act like this.

At the same time, Chiho, who kept silent and refused to say anything like a closed-up clam, was more troublesome to handle than the Yoshiya from before.

If they could not make Chiho spit out what was within the shell and recover her spirits, everyone would definitely worry.

"Sasachi~ are you feeling uncomfortable today? It seems to me that you haven't eaten."

Kaori sat on the empty seat in front of Chiho and spoke to her as she was slumped over the table.

Then—

".....No, I'm very hungry."

Chiho replied in a more spirited and realistic way than Kaori had imagined.

"I see. There won't be any seats in the student cafeteria if we go now anyway, so why don't we eat here? You did say you forgot to bring money, but I don't think you would even forget your bento, right?"

"I forgot to bring it."

"Hey!"

Kaori could not help but laugh.

"Then let's make Yoshiya pay and eat curry rice or udon at the student

cafeteria. For these two things, they should still be available even now.”

The student cafeteria of Sasahata High School was the same as most schools, the lunch competition was very fierce, but under the arrangement of the school, only curry rice and udon had a lot more stock, so there would still be leftovers even after the initial chaos had calmed down. The price was also 200 yen. It was set at a reasonable price so that it was affordable with the allowance of a high school student.

“.....”

Chiho did not raise her head, and hesitated a little.

“These are the only two things I don’t want to eat today. Sorry.”

“Curry rice and udon?”

“Yeah.”

“How did curry rice and udon offend you?”

“.....I caused trouble for them.”

“To curry rice and udon?”

“Yeah.”

“Is Sasachi’s true identity a pure soba fairy, so you refuse to recognise the evil sects of curry rice and udon?”

“I am an udon person.”

“Actually causing trouble to the leader of your own group!”

The two of them continued with this shaky conversation, and after a short while, Kaori sighed lightly, adjusted her sitting position and surveyed her surroundings.

Yoshiya seemed to have gone with the other male students to the student cafeteria, so he was not seen anywhere, the bento group who stayed in the classroom seemed to be focused on chatting with their comrades.

Even so, still paying attention to her surroundings, Kaori whispered in a volume which only Chiho could hear, “Were you dumped?”

“N-No!”

“Ugoh!”

“It hurts! Pu!”

Chiho raised her head quickly, and the back of her head hit Kaori’s face with a huge impact as Kaori was speaking next to Chiho’s ear. Chiho’s face then bounced back onto the table and she hit her nose hard as her head moved downwards.

Kaori also leaned backwards because of the unexpected impact, and almost fell off her chair.

Then—

“I feel a little apologetic.”

“I’m the one who should say sorry.”

Kaori and Chiho went to the medical room in a harmonious manner.

The high school girls, in the height of their youth, started having nosebleeds because they had knocked into each other in the classroom, it was too embarrassing.

After accepting the emergency care from the school nurse and resting for a while, having stopped the nosebleeds, the two of them left the medical room, and walked along the corridor which appeared dark because it was daytime outside.

“Then?”

“.....Do I have to say it?”

“If you don’t say anything, then we’re going to eat curry rice or udon.”

“Augh.....”

“What’s wrong? Could it be that curry rice and udon isn’t some analogy, and you really hate those two things?”

Kaori smiled in a troubled manner.

"It can be considered an analogy, yet it can also not be an analogy, rather than saying I hate them, it's more like it's not convenient to meet them."

"Sigh, anyway, let's just go outside."

Kaori pulled Chiho towards the school yard.

A few male students from an unknown year were playing soccer in their uniforms, sweating in their shirts in this cold weather.

Their group was rather big, and seeing how the hem of their pants were greatly worn down by friction, they probably did this often.

Kaori and Chiho leaned on the wall in the corner of the school building, looking for an opportunity to speak.

"Since you obediently followed me here, does it mean that you're willing to tell me?"

"If I don't do it, it feels like you're not going to back off."

Trying to find a place within the school building where there were no people around during lunch break was unexpectedly difficult.

The platform of the stairs leading to the roof was commonly thought to be void of people, but not only was that place good for resting while avoiding the sights of the teaching staff, it was also a place to play poker and other games, so the competition there was unexpectedly high. Within the industrial work classrooms, science labs, music rooms, and other special classrooms, students from the clubs which used those places as their base or students with the same interests would gather there.

Therefore, in this weather, it would be easier to find a place without no one around if they went outside.

"Sigh..... where should I start....."

"Then? Who's the other party? The senior from your workplace?"

"Kao-chan? I haven't said anything yet.....!"

Chiho troubled over where she should begin her explanation, and Kaori just

cut to the heart of the problem directly, causing Chiho to jump up in fright.

When she realised that she would not be able to bluff her way through no matter what she said, once she had landed, Chiho squatted down, hugging both her knees.

Kaori and Yoshiya had gone to the MgRonalds in front of Hatagaya Station where Chiho worked a lot of times, Chiho had also mentioned ‘the senior at her workplace’ to them before.

However, Chiho rarely showed Kaori her working self, so she did not expect Kaori to deduce this so accurately.

“Sasachi is really easy to understand in this aspect. Based on the information I have obtained so far, I deduced that you have failed in your confession when you were eating curry rice or udon.



“What kind of situation is this?”

Chiho was about to complain, but after considering everything that had occurred up to this point, it was not impossible that something like this could happen

“Let me say this first, I wasn’t rejected by anyone.”

“Then what is it?”

“.....That is, erhm.....”

Chiho chose her words carefully.

“This has nothing to do with being dumped..... I was simply too impatient.”

“Impatient?”

“Hm..... erhm, nothing happened..... but too many things happened during the time nothing happened, so it became very unclear.”

“You used ‘thing’ way too many times. Then again, by ‘nothing happened’ and ‘too impatient’, it feels like Sasachi is already dating that senior, yet the other party isn’t making any advances towards you, so you feel unsatisfied or something like that.”

“It-it’s not that! We’re not dating!” Chiho denied this frantically.

“You’re not? What was that person called. I remember that his name was rather unique.”

“Maou-san.”

“Maou. Was that his name? I’ve only met him once or twice, so I don’t remember his name.”

Kaori shrugged.

“Then? You’re not dating, but why did you say ‘nothing happened’? Could it have something to do with Sasachi’s bento becoming more luxurious since summer started?”

“You noticed?” Chiho asked in surprise.

“Because Sasachi’s bento was obviously more luxurious than the others. It

was a huge amount too.”

“.....Yeah, I even became fatter for a while some time back.”

“I see, I heard something good.”

Once she made up her mind to put down the burden within her heart, even Kaori’s jokes were pleasant to listen to.

The earliest chance for Chiho to bring food to Villa Rosa Room 201 was when Suzuno had moved into the room next to Maou and started to frequently go the to Demon Fortress.

In addition, Chiho had misunderstood that Suzuno felt affection for Maou, igniting her fighting spirit.

However, from her point of view as a high school girl, Suzuno’s skills clearly exceeded the level of home cooking and Chiho would not be able to surpass her with just normal practice, so for the first time in her life, Chiho had seriously started to practice her cooking.

In fact, Chiho’s mother had already seen through her motives, and reported this to her father.

Her father showed a complicated expression, but using the reason ‘with this I can save the effort of thinking of what to make for the bento everyday’, Chiho’s mother taught her many things.

With this, Chiho began her battle strategy of bringing food to the Demon Fortress, but only less than one third of the food Chiho had made was sent to the dinner table of the Demon Fortress.

In order not to lose to Suzuno, Chiho conducted many trials at the beginning, but when trying complicated dishes when her skills were not up to par, she had failed many times.

Chiho’s ‘confession’ happened on a day worth remembering, the day she was able to give Maou an appreciation gift for the first time.

It felt like it had happened a long time ago, but only less than half a year had passed since that day.

Only at that moment, the hot stuffy air and the cry of the crickets disappeared

from Chiho's senses.

She was not acting rash or going with the flow of events, Chiho had confessed with a sense of strong belief.

She believed that only that time was suitable.

The Chiho at that time was different from the Chiho who had only just started paying attention to Maou, she already knew many things about him. Even after knowing, her feelings had not changed.

Therefore, she expressed her feelings towards the 'person' whom she truly liked for the first time in her life.

"Oooh! So thrilling!"

".....Don't tease me. I'm really embarrassed."

Kaori expressed her surprise in an exaggerated manner.

Chiho summarised to Kaori what had happened so far. She had left out everything related to Ente Isla, but spoke the truth about the other parts. Thanks to that, despite the cold weather, Chiho blushed so much that even her ears had turned red.

"Oh my~ when I was in middle school, I had thought that everyone would be busy finding a boyfriend or girlfriend once they went to high school. However, including me, the people around us unexpectedly did not show any signs of doing so, right? Sigh, it's not like it doesn't happen at all, but this is the first time someone close to me confessed to someone."

"Uuuu....."

"Sasachi is so cute. And then? How did the other party reply?"

Of course, when someone knew that a confession had happened, they would be concerned about the results.

However, Chiho responded with a dark expression, "Erhm..... this is one of the reasons I felt impatient..... actually, the other party had not answered me."

"What?"

Kaori's reaction this time appeared to be that of true surprise.

“You said he hasn’t replied, but didn’t you confess during the summer holidays? Eh? It’s already December now!”

“Yeah.”

“Eh, after that, weren’t both of you working together normally?”

Actually, other than working, they had experienced many things together, but Chiho skipped those things and did not mention them—

“.....Yeah.”

—nodding in affirmation.

“I did tell him not to rush in his answer to me.”

“Oh..... but, hm~ even if it is like that..... sigh, forget it. Then, since this is one of the reasons, it means that there are other reasons, right?”

“Yeah. That is.....”

To continue explaining in detail, there would be no choice but to mention Alas=Ramus.

Chiho started to explain in a summarised manner, being more careful not to say anything related to Ente Isla.

Maou had dissolute relatives who had placed their young child under his care. Considering her position as a high school student, Chiho was unable to actively go to the home of a single man to take care of the child.

“That’s true. If you did such a thing and the teacher found out, it wouldn’t be something that could be solved with counselling.”

“Yeah. The shop manager at my workplace also lectured me about this before. I have to consider what it looks like in the eyes of other people.”

Since it was like this, and Maou had wished for it to be like this as well, Chiho decided to help with whatever was possible for her.

However, with regards to taking care of that relative’s child, that job was handed over to another lady.

“So, that means a rival has appeared?”

“Kao-chan, why do you look a little happy about it?”

“What can I do? Faced with this development, besides feeling excited, what else can I feel?”

“That may be so..... but the other party did not have such motives.”

That lady known as Yusa Emi had known Maou for a long time, an independent mature woman, so it would not be an issue even if she were to frequently visit Maou’s home.

There was room for debate with regards to whether Emi was willing to go to Maou’s home or not, but in the end, that relative’s child had greatly lessened the physical distance between Emi and Maou.

And the person who had told Chiho many things about Maou in detail at the beginning was that Yusa Emi.

“She is an amazing, beautiful, and reliable older sister. She is my important friend.”

“.....I know that Sasachi truly thinks so, but listening to this so far, this situation feels like you have sunk into a swamp.”

The two of them may have known each other for a long time, but the relationship between Emi and Maou was very bad. If not for this relative’s child, the two of them would have been unable to converse normally.

“Why would that kind of person want to help take care of that relative’s child?”

“It’s a long story, a lot of things happened in between. One of the reasons was that the child is very close to Yusa-san.”

“Oh~”

The two of them had a very tense relationship. However, Chiho, who had good relations with the two of them, always hoped that they could get along.

At this moment, Emi lost her job because she was involved in some trouble.

However, with her natural mobility and talent, Emi had immediately found her next workplace.

“Eh, could it be?”

“Yeah, that would be the MgRonalds Maou-san and I are working at.”

“Uwah~ so horrifying, this situation is so horrifying!”

“Describing it like that is not quite right. Because although I have confessed, we are not dating, and my relationship with Yusa-san is very good, so I was truly hoping that she could come to our store. The store was also short handed as well, I had also asked Maou-san to ask Yusa-san.”

“Why would you do such a thing?”

“If they are doing similar jobs, they might end up improving their relationship with each other.”

“This child actually built her own horrifying battlefield.....”

“I already said that it’s not horrifying at all! I’m not quarrelling with Maou-san or Yusa-san.”

“Then what? Since you’re so determined about it, this means that everything is developing according to Sasachi’s intentions, right? Successfully working together with your friend and the person you like, and since the reply has been delayed for a rather long time, if you’re not anxious about wanting a reply from the other party, then Maou-san holding back his reply should also be within your plans, right?”

“Yeah..... that is true.”

Chiho lowered her head.

“Some time back, a senior at work resigned. The reason was because he was starting to look for full time work, and at that time, I suddenly thought of something. Aren’t there people already preparing for exams in our class?”

“Yeah. It feels like more people are going for tuition classes.”

“After that senior had left, the normal everyday scenery started to change slightly as well. Such as one less row in the work shift timetable, or a change in the position one is responsible for during a certain day in the week. When I noticed these changes, I was really surprised. It felt like I had noticed that I was unable to maintain this current situation forever.”

"Maintain the current situation, what does that mean?" Kaori asked in confusion.

Chiho began to slowly speak about what she had been considering the whole time today.

"My second year in high school is a period where I can live freely under the protection of my parents without huge events like examinations which will influence my life greatly, as long as I go to school, I can go to classes, eat, and participate in club activities with Kao-chan, Emura-kun, and the others. As long as I go to work, I will be able to see Maou-san, Yusa-san and Kisaki-san. At Maou-san's apartment, there are Suzuno-san and Maou-san's friends, Ashiya-san and Urushihara-san..... I had discovered that environment which I took for granted was actually just a temporary stage in life. I truly understood this fact..... then....."

"Yeah."

"I thought that I might just disappear in front of someone in the future just like Kouta-san, I suddenly became very bothered about things which I was not concerned about before."

"Is Kouta the senior who resigned?"

"That's right. Ugh, I remember his full name was Nakayama.....Nakayama Koutarou. Because we normally use nicknames when we address each other, I find it hard to recall his actual name."

"Ah, I can understand that."

"Then, after that, I started thinking about some meaningless things."

Using nicknames to address each other was a natural thing to do for the employees of the MgRonalds in front of Hatagaya Station.

It was not something which was mandated, there were people who used other nicknames, and people who addressed other people by their last name in a normal way. Everybody's situation was different: using Chiho as an example, besides Emi, everyone addressed her as 'Chi-chan'.

"Maou-san only uses nicknames when addressing me. He calls Yusa-san Emi,

calls the neighbour Suzuno. Only I am Chi-chan.”

“Yeah.”

Using nicknames to address the other party was not necessarily looking down on them. Maou had been addressing her this way before they had built up a strong relationship, but Kaori decided to nod silently in response.

“Even now, Maou-san still insists that this relationship with Yusa-san is not good, but he has been treating Yusa-san kindly since a long time back. He acts crudely so as not to hurt Yusa-san’s pride.”

“Hmm.”

“Amongst the people who have gathered at Maou-san’s apartment, I am the only student staying at my own home. I have to take the exams next year as well. The chances to meet everyone will decrease no matter what..... and.....”

“And?”

“.....Recently, a person both Maou-san and Yusa-san know came..... to ask them to accept a huge task.”

This huge task was of course Lailah’s wish to save the humans of Ente Isla, but this could not be revealed.

“Ah, okay.”

“Until now, I have thought that my everyday life would be to spend time with everyone, and that this would continue on forever. But it’s not like this at all, not only that, when I discovered that what I thought was my everyday life was just a very short period of time, I started to feel anxious.”

“Y-yeah.”

Kaori nodded as she squatted down next to Chiho to lightly stroke her back.

“Perhaps Maou-san and the rest would go somewhere else. However, I am unable to leave this place. The place where Maou-san and the others belonged was different from mine. So..... I suddenly wanted to know the answer.”

“Yeah.”

“I really wished for Maou-san and Yusa-san to get along, but once I see Maou-

san care for Yusa-san, there is this tight feeling in my chest. No matter how much effort I put in, next year, I will not be able to stay by Maou-san's side like how it is right now. Perhaps only one year is needed to prepare for the exam and it only lasts a short period just like the everyday life I am currently experiencing. However, if Maou-san and the others decide to accept this task..... I don't know how much the future will change. I may not be able to see them for a few years. Therefore, I am really envious of the people who can be together with him by their own choice."

"Yeah."

"But..... I like Yusa-san the most. However, I became jealous of her because of such a meaningless and unsolvable thing, what am I doing, it's everything which I wished for, yet no matter how much effort I put in....."

"Yeah."

Kaori hugged Chiho's shoulders.

As a sign of respect, she did not look at Chiho's face.

"Who am I to Maou-san?"

This was a small sense of uneasiness which existed in Chiho's heart like a thorn.

"I am always being protected by him, or being a burden to him, I may have even caused him a lot of trouble, and he simply wasn't showing it because of his kindness. I am also always thinking negatively, messing up my mental state."

Chiho may have confessed to Maou before, but it was different from the normal 'Please go out with me'.

She was simply expressing her feelings of liking him.

Therefore, even if she wanted an answer, Chiho did not know what answer she was hoping for.

"Honestly speaking, I may not understand all of this that well..... but Sasachi really likes those people, huh. I should be the one feeling jealous."

"Ah, s-sorry. It's not like that."

“I know that. They’re them and we’re us. I also know many things about Sasachi which Maou-san and the others do not. Anyway, you could not forgive yourself for feeling jealous of them, but while you could not forgive yourself, you could not sort out your own feelings, so everything just exploded out like that, right?”

“Yeah.....”

“Your face looks really bad. Did you bring a handkerchief?”

“.....No.”

“Here, have a tissue.”

“Thank you.....”

Without realising it, Chiho had cried again, and snot even came out of her nose.

“.....And I even told Suzuno-san about all of this.”

“Uwah, that’s bad. Suzuno-san is Maou-san’s neighbour, right?”

“Yeah. I met her on the streets, and at that time I was unable to control myself just like right now. When I came back to my senses, I was already being counselled by her at Excentricksior. Thinking back to that time, Suzuno-san must have been very confused, but she still listened till the end.”

However, even if Suzuno could understand Chiho’s troubles, she still did not give Chiho any answers.

Suzuno may have gotten angry at Maou-san for being inconsiderate or being over-dependent on Chiho, but with regards to Chiho’s uneasiness at parting ways with Maou and the others, she would probably be unable to offer any comfort.

“I see. You were unable to get an answer from the person you like, you were jealous of an important friend, and you also complained to the person who looked out for you. It can’t be helped that you hated the way you acted.”

“.....Then, I ended up in the state I was in today.”

“Alright, I roughly know what is going on now. Other than the matter about

curry rice and udon.”

Kaori nodded a few times, then opened her mouth and asked, “Now what? Would it be better if I voiced out what I thought?”

“.....If you have any, then please.”

From Chiho’s point of view, after Suzuno, she was being embarrassingly dependent upon Kaori, she did not know what she was doing anymore.

“Yeah. Then I’ll be direct, I feel that Sasachi should be more willful.”

“What do you mean?”

“In the literal sense. Such as grabbing the front of Maou-san’s shirt and asking him to answer your confession! Or how about telling him directly that you feel unhappy that he’s being kind to Yusa-san?”

However, the answers Kaori gave were too extreme, giving Chiho a huge shock.

“Eh, ehh? I can’t do things like that!”

“Why?”

“Why, because.....”

Why? Why can’t she do it? Can’t do such a thing? Why?

“You’ve never done such things, right?”

“Y-yeah, I have not.”

“I am not asking you to force yourself into a conflict with Yusa-san, since your relationship is so good, then you should honestly tell her about your feelings. As for wanting to date, all you have to say that is that it might be this kind of situation for the whole of next year, but you still wish to spend as much time as possible together with the other party. I feel that this is the only way to solve this.”

“Is..... is that so?”

“These are my most honest thoughts after listening to what you said. And, I may not know how important of a friend Yusa-san is to you, but seeing the person you like being caring to other girls, it would be natural to feel unhappy.

This is normal. In addition, Yusa-san doesn't know that you're jealous and yet you're so depressed about it, it's honestly irritating."

"Augh....."

Not only was Kaori's answer extreme, it was also merciless.

She aimed at the parts where Chiho had started to suspect that it might be so and attacked with full power, sinking Chiho.

"Acting like this, it seems like you just want to act like a good child. Even if you're jealous, friends are still friends. Wouldn't that be fine? If your relationship turns bad because of this, that just shows how shallow the relationship is."

Suzuno did not give this kind of opinion. It was a merciless opinion, but Chiho could not rebuke at all.

For an opinion coming from someone of her age, this was a very persuasive opinion.

"As long as you have given it your all once before, you won't be afraid of failure the next time. In addition, since that person called Suzuno was so aggrieved about your situation, there's no reason not to ask her for help, correct? Having no answer after four months is really too long after all."

"Y-yeah....."

"But, I am able to make it sound so easy because these things have nothing to do with me. The one making the decision in the end is still Sasachi."

".....Yeah, thank you. Sorry, it feels like I explained it in a messy way."

"If you explained it too neatly, I would have been troubled as well. Because I have no experience in love, if you came to me to discuss about the guy you're dating two-timing you, I would definitely run away. And I may not ask you about it, but when everything has been settled, don't forget to report to me, okay?"

"Y-yeah."

Seeing Kaori being so serious, Chiho decided that she should at least embarrass herself in front of Kaori once more.

“Also.....”

Next, Kaori neatened the hem of her skirt, got up, and looked in the direction of the school building.

After Chiho looked over in that direction as well, she saw the clock installed on the school building.

“Ah!”

Chiho discovered the reason Kaori had looked in that direction. The hands of the clock pointed mercilessly to the position which showed that lunch break would end in five minutes.

“With regards to causing me to miss lunch, we’ll discuss about it later.”

“Uh, erhm, let’s wait until next time when I have my wallet.”

When she had finished speaking about what was bottled within her and her stomach suddenly started feeling hungry, it was already too late.

During the fifth and sixth periods after that, Chiho could only put up with the sense of hunger.

“Sigh.....I’m so hungry.....”

Once Chiho reached home, she collapsed on the bed within her room.

Chiho had borrowed money from Kaori and bought bread from the convenience store near the school in between the sixth period and her club activities, but since Chiho normally had a sizable appetite, one salty bread was not enough at all.

As Chiho also became agitated and mentally confused in a different way compared to before because of Kaori, during the club activities, not only did she make mistakes in her shooting posture and snap her arrows, her juniors even heard her stomach growling, it was really terrible.

Chiho had a kind nature, a determined attitude, and normally had good

shooting posture, so all her juniors were worried that she was sick. However, it was not as if she could tell them that she had missed lunch because she was troubled over love.

In the end, it was Kaori who had reassured the worried Yoshiya and juniors. In addition to the favour Chiho owed Kaori for lending her lunch money, it seemed like it would be a while before Chiho would be able to look at Kaori in the eyes.

“Ah, oh yes, my phone.”

Her mobile phone which was left at home while being connected to the charger showed the calls and messages received.

“Eh? Mum?”

Close to the school dismissal time, Chiho’s mother Riho had called her a few times.

From how Chiho did not see her mother once she returned home, her mother probably had something to do in the evening which could not be tackled at home.

After pressing the re-dial, the phone only rang once—

“Seriously, Chiho, I called a few times, why didn’t you pick up?”

“Sorry, I forgot my mobile phone at home, so I didn’t bring it out today.”

“So that’s what happened. That means you’re at home now?”

“Yeah.”

“I see. Actually, a friend from my schooling days was admitted to hospital, I went to meet up with a friend who lives nearby so we can visit together.”

“Is that so. Admitted to hospital huh, is it serious?”

“That person pitifully encountered a car accident and has bone fractures. It isn’t life threatening, but as a friend living nearby, I would be heartless if I didn’t visit. Because everyone is only free today, it was decided in an impromptu manner. I’m at Shinjuku now, but it’s a different hospital from where you stayed at.”

“I understand. Then I’ll just settle dinner on my own.”

“Will it be alright? Your father will be working today and not coming home.”

“How about you, mum? Are you eating with friends?”

“I don’t think I will go drink alcohol after the visit, but I am planning to eat with my friends. I won’t stay out too late. Everyone is working. So that’s how things are, I hope you understand.”

“Yeah, I understand. Please be careful..... now what should I do.”

After hanging up, Chiho buried her face in the pillow.

Chiho was really hungry after club activities ended, but since she had to go home for dinner, she could not carelessly snack on food, which was why she had rejected Kaori’s and Yoshiya’s offer to treat her to tea.

But in the end, not only was her mother not at home, she even had to settle dinner on her own.

Whether it was eating out or buying food from the convenience store, she had to gather up her motivation to go out. At the same time, she did not feel like making her own food.

It felt like if she cooked, her feelings would be in a mess again.

“What should I do..... eh?”

Chiho started playing with her phone and saw an unexpected name in the messages she received.

She had received this message at 5pm, located in between the message from 13 Ice Cream about their vouchers and the MgRonalds promotional message.

“How rare. Did something happen?”

After Chiho read the contents, she made a call immediately.

That was a message from Suzuki Rika inviting her out for dinner.

Just after 6pm, at the ticketing gate of Sasazuka Station which had become more crowded from the people getting off work, Chiho discovered Rika who

was standing there in a bored manner.

“Ah, found her. Suzuki-san!”

“Oh, Chiho-chan, hello. Sorry for suddenly asking you out at this time.”

After Chiho ran over, she noticed that Rika was not wearing her normal casual clothes, but had made an effort to dress up.

“Your family doesn’t mind?”

“Yeah, my parents aren’t at home today. Is Suzuki-san heading home from some other place?”

“Yeah, something like that.”

Rika replied in a rather vague manner.

“Then, like I said in the message, is it convenient for you to eat dinner with me?”

“Yeah, it’s fine.”

Chiho could not guess the reason for being invited out.

Chiho may have improved her relations with Rika recently, but if Rika had wanted to find someone to eat with, she should have asked Emi first.

Just as Chiho was thinking about this, Rika spoke first like she had guessed Chiho’s thoughts, “It just so happened that I wanted to meet with you today instead of Emi.”

“Is that so?”

It was a rather good feeling to become someone the other person wanted to meet, but this did not dispel the strange feeling Chiho had.

The feeling Rika gave off was different from normal.

Though Rika did not lose her cheerful personality after being attacked by the knights from the Eastern Continent of Ente Isla, a strange sense of darkness could be felt from her current expression.

“Sigh, let’s decide where to eat first. Even if I am saying this, it’s not like I can bring Chiho-chan to a drinking place, so we will probably go to a family

restaurant, is that alright?"

"Yeah, anywhere is fine."

"Then let's go. Even so, I'm not familiar with the stores around here, are there any stores you want to go to or recommend?"

"Uh, about that."

For a working adult like Rika, what kind of store would she go to at a time like this?

Feeling like her tastes were being tested, Chiho crossed her arms seriously and started thinking.

It was hard to imagine that Rika would dress up and look for her without any reason.

Perhaps there was something about Emi, Maou and the others, which she wanted to discuss with Chiho alone.

It needed to be a place suitable for talking, a place someone of Chiho's age could go to at 6pm, and a place which they could eat.

Mostly importantly, because of various reasons, Chiho felt hungrier than usual.

"That's right!"

"Oh, have you thought of some nice place?"

"Yeah, but we need to walk for quite some distance, is that fine?"

"It's alright. Let's go."

During the ten minutes of walking from Sasazuka Station, Rika casually asked about Chiho's situation in school, and Chiho also replied in a casual manner. As the both of them chatted, they reached a 100 yen sushi store "Gyogyoen".

"Oh, this store is not bad. It's this one, right?"

From Rika's expression, this does not seem like a bad choice.

"Do you come here frequently? I only know the name of the store, and have never went inside. In addition, there isn't one within my usual area of activity."

"I have never eaten very expensive sushi, but I feel that this should be considered rather good."

"Oh."

"I haven't come here in a while, but I recall seeing an advertisement that it was introducing new premium ingredients, so this is a good opportunity."

"Ah~ it's like a chain of specialty 100 yen stores introducing premium sushi priced at 200 yen, or selling ramen even though they are a sushi store, there have been a lot of changes recently."

"I'm not sure if they sell ramen."

Chiho opened the door of the store with a troubled smile.

Luckily, they did not coincide with the dinner crowd and successfully found seats.

"But, it should be worth trying."

Chiho said as she wiped her hands with the wet towel.

"When Emerada-san had first come to Japan, she ate almost thirty plates on her own while saying 'Delicious, delicious'."

".....Oh, that petite sized Emerada, huh."

Rika momentarily showed a surprised expression, and after wiping her hands, she leaned back against the sofa.

"Ah~ so tired, I can't take it anymore. Sigh~"

"Did you come back after going some place far away?"

"No, it's close by. Very close by."

Rika accepted the green tea Chiho had brewed with matcha powder, mumbling softly at the same time, "I went on a date with Ashiya-san at Shinjuku today."

"Oh, a date with Ashiya-san..... hot!"

After spending some time understanding what Rika had said, Chiho spilled some hot water as she was pouring it into her cup.

“Are you alright? Did you scald yourself?”

“I-I’m fine, I am fine, but eh, ehh? Suzuki-san, on a date with Ashiya-san, eh..... ehhhhh?”

“Chiho-chan, you’re acting too surprised. I am a mature lady after all, of course I will go on dates with other people.”

“Uh, that’s not what I meant, I wasn’t feeling surprised at that part, t-that Ashiya-san, went, went on a date?”

‘Ashiya’ being affiliated with the term ‘date’ was probably comparable to ‘Urushihara’ being affiliated with the term ‘working hard’.

As she was too surprised, Chiho could not speak for a while.

“Are you shocked?”

“.....Honestly, I am very shocked.”

“Is it that bad~?”

“Ah, no, erhm, I definitely do not think that Suzuki-san has no charisma, it’s just that I have never heard of Ashiya-san going out for reasons other than going to the supermarket, library, short term work, or matters related to Maou-san.”

“So you were shocked about that.”

Rika leaned forward with a troubled smile.

“This is not the first time I’ve gone out with Ashiya-san. Maou-san and Suzuno-chan may have been there as well, but I have gone out with them to buy televisions before.”

“Uh, but, that time is different from this time, right? Because, since, since it was a date.....”

“Yeah, it’s just the two of us.”

“Wah!”

Hearing too many shocking things at once, Chiho could only produce this kind of air-headed sound.

“Oh my, I actually find Chiho-chan’s reaction rather precious.”

“Eh? Ah, s-sorry, I said some rather rude things just now.....”

“It’s alright. More accurately, you should be apologising to Ashiya-san instead. I don’t know how he acts at home, but he does act respectably when he’s outdoors.”

“T-that..... is true.”

“However, from how Chiho-chan is acting, this fact was probably not leaked out.”

“Is, is something wrong?”

“Didn’t Maou-san or Suzuno-chan tell you anything?”

“Maou-san and Suzuno-san? About the date today?”

“No, it’s not about that. Sigh, I might have called it a date, but it was really no different from the time I went with Suzuno-chan to buy the televisions. Ashiya-san finally bought a mobile phone today. And it’s even a Slimphone. I helped by giving advice.”

“Ashiya-san bought a mobile phone?”

Would the rotation of the Earth reverse direction tomorrow?

Chiho was too shocked and almost spilled the tea again.

“He seemed to have felt that there was a need for one a long time ago. When we were buying the televisions, I did agree to help him with that next time, but it just kept getting delayed because a lot of things happened.”

“A lot..... many things did happen.”

“Right?”

Since Maou had bought the television up to now, not only did Chiho learn spells and encounter life threatening dangers, Rika’s perception of the ‘world’ and ‘humans’ was also overturned.

“Besides that, Ashiya-san wanted to apologise to me for the incidents related to Ente Isla and continue the explanations which were not done properly because of the incidents, that’s about it. I also accepted his invitation.”

“So that’s how it is.”

“Sigh, most of what was said overlapped with what I’d heard from Chiho-chan and Emi. However, because it was told from a demon’s point of view, it felt rather interesting. When he started talking about which areas had strong knights and how much trouble Emi and Emerada-chan caused them, I really didn’t know how to react.”

“I understand. I have also heard about the things which happened before the demons invaded Ente Isla. Because it was so interesting, I felt that it was a little rude towards Yusa-san and Suzuno-san to feel this way.”

“I know right. Emi may have told me not to feel too bothered about it, but to us who are not involved in the situation, it’s difficult to know how to react.”

After Rika said this with a smile, she sighed hard and started rotating her shoulders.

“Ah~ I still feel a little tired. Sigh.”

As if Rika was trying to soothe the pain from a persistent shoulder ache, she sighed greatly once again after moving her arms for a bit.

“Is something wrong?”

“Yeah, a lot of things happened when I went out with Ashiya-san.”

Rika rotated her neck this time and took a deep breath.

“Suzuki-san? Are you alright?”

“I have mostly recovered..... ah, yeah. Then, we parted ways a short while ago.”

At the station, Chiho had felt that Rika’s expression was a little melancholic, but it was only after sitting face to face in a bright store did Chiho realise that Rika’s complexion was really bad.

It was as if Rika had just recovered from an illness, her skin was pale as well.

Just as Chiho started to worry about Rika’s health condition, what Rika said next caused Chiho to momentarily stop thinking.

“I confessed to him, and was rejected beautifully.”

Whether it was her thoughts, or the noise within the store, everything vanished from Chiho's senses.

Only Rika's flat expression as she nonchalantly said this sentence occupied Chiho's field of view.

"What....."

"It's really hard."

Rika smiled at the speechless Chiho.

"Sigh, it's not appropriate to talk about this kind of topic while on an empty stomach, let's eat while chatting."

After that, Rika naturally turned towards the sushi area, but Chiho had not moved at all.

Even the fact that she was hungry had blown away from her mind.

※

I hope I did not overdress.

Rika, waiting for Ashiya at the ticketing gate at the West exit of Shinjuku Station, checked her outfit once again.

".....Yeah, no problems."

It may have been just the two of them this time, but it was not difficult to imagine that their plans for today would be very different from what was frivolously termed a date. Apologising, explaining, and giving advice with regards to buying a phone, Rika used these terms which did not sound romantic at all to suppress her accelerating heartbeat.

A light brown jacket paired with a dress. A bag used when going out and a gold necklace which she did not wear normally.

Yeah, when compared to how I dress when going to work, it's just a little more extravagant.

"A-and Ashiya-san will definitely act just like normal, so it's more like I should be mentally prepared to be the one to guide him!"

Thinking about it carefully, the last time she had met up with Ashiya alone

was when he was taken away by Gabriel.

Rika was no longer a girl who loved to dream, during this season when it was beginning to cool down, it was the period to dress more warmly, so she did not think that Ashiya would spend money on dressing up.

So—

“Suzuki-san, I kept you waiting.”

After Rika looked up, feeling rather excited just by hearing this pleasurable voice—

“Ah, ahh, ahhh, eh?”

—her heart immediately started to beat vigorously because of the view which had entered her field of vision.

“I’m sorry for making you wait in this cold weather. Because I don’t normally wear this kind of clothing, I spent some time preparing before going out.”

“Uh, no, erhm, I just arrived, there’s no need to be bothered by this, but.....”

“Is something wrong?”

“It-it’s nothing, uh, erhm.....”

Ashiya had only tilted his head a little and Rika’s heart rate started to increase.

Rika felt that all the simulations she had run through in her mind in order to calm down were all shattered instantaneously.

She did not expect this kind of situation.

“I did not expect..... that you’d be wearing a suit.”

Ashiya wore a dark grey, well fitted three piece suit.

“Ah, this?”

Ashiya showed a wry smile.

“I bought this a long time back, but I have only worn it two or three times so far.”

A well ironed shirt paired with new leather shoes and a neat striped necktie.

The jacket on his arm looked like a light down jacket from UNIXLO, but other than that, Ashiya's height and stature made him look like a model for western style suits.

Rika was unable to suppress her heartbeat, and clearly felt her face redden.

This is too illegal, there should be a limit to ambushes.

"It's embarrassing, but because I wore it so rarely, I even forgot how to tie the necktie. I hope it doesn't look too strange."

"It's not strange at all! Very handsome!"

Rika shouted on reflex.

"I-I should be the one who didn't dress properly, sorry."

She had worried if she had overdressed, but suddenly felt very regretful now.

If she had known this would have happened, she would have spent more effort in dressing up.

Not only did she frequently wear this jacket when going to work and this attire greatly resembled her normal casual clothes, she could not even remember when she bought the shoes she was currently wearing.

The bag she brought today was the one she really liked, there were small scratches on the cover.

"No, you did nothing of that sort."

Ashiya shook his head with a calm smile.

"Suzuki-san had experienced a series of terrifying incidents, so I had thought you would reject my invitation. I am grateful that you're accompanying me today. Your attire isn't sloppy at all. It's very beautiful."

"Ugh~~!"

Rika's thoughts quickly exceeded their upper limit.

Rika would normally not be concerned about empty polite words like 'beautiful'.

However, no sense of pretence could be felt from Ashiya's words at all.

He really thought it was beautiful.

“T-Thank you.....”

With this, Rika could only honestly give her thanks.

“So, what shall we do next? Because I have many things to tell Suzuki-san first, if you don’t mind, I would like to find a store where we can eat.”

“Y-Yeah, uh, okay, I’ll leave it to you.”

Rika’s plans were already shattered by the unexpected heavy blow, so she could only nod to agree with Ashiya’s suggestion.

“Then, I have made a list of a few potential locations.”

As Ashiya spoke, he took out a folded piece of paper from his inner pocket.

Just seeing Ashiya moving his hand into his inner pocket to take out something was enough to cause Rika’s heart to start thumping vigorously.

“After going through the underpass, there is an Italian restaurant which sells delicious charcoal baked pizza, within the Lumina department store, there is a creative Japanese restaurant which provides unlimited side dishes during lunch period..... after that, there is a Russian restaurant selling very delicious sour cream beef which is quite some walking distance away from the station.....”

“Ah, that one has closed down already.”

Suddenly receiving information which she knew about, Rika finally regained her composure and reacted.

“Eh? Is that so? The website’s information was probably too outdated.”

It seemed like Ashiya had gathered information on a website which listed delicious food and printed out the maps.

Ashiya had mentioned before that he was not good with electronics, so he had probably asked Urushihara for help.

“I liked that Russian restaurant a lot, but that place closed down recently. By the way, I do not recommend the Italian restaurant which occupied that space afterwards.”

“I see. Thinking about it, Suzuki-san works in Shinjuku. You probably know a

lot of stores, so rather than having me pick a restaurant based off poor search methods, we should go to a store Suzuki-san likes.”

“Eh, ah..... erhm.....”

The store Hanamaru Udon which Rika had gone before with Maou and Suzuno momentarily flashed through her mind, but she shook her head and said, “I-I want to go to the store which provides side dishes!”

“Is that alright?”

“Y-Yeah. The Italian restaurant is rather nice, but it would be bad if sauce gets onto Ashiya-san’s suit, right? I have never been to that side dish store before, so.....”

Rika kneaded the strap of her bag in a nervous manner.

“So, let’s go the to store Ashiya-san picked.”

As if she had reverted to a teenage girl, a comfortable feeling of anxiety welled up in Rika’s heart.

“Is that so, I understand. Then let’s go.”

“Y-Yeah!”

Ashiya nodded in straightforward manner and started walking after prompting Rika to do the same.

The quickest way to the Lumina department store from the west exit was to pass through the underground mall beside the ticketing gate of the Keio Line and walk up the stairs on the left.

Walking within Shinjuku which was filled with the lunch crowd, Rika noticed that Ashiya had naturally slowed down to match her speed.

Every time Rika saw the reflections of Ashiya and herself in the display windows or on the screens belonging to the stores, a sweet sense of pain would be felt within her heart.

Their reflected figures looked just like a normal Japanese guy and girl.

Colleagues working in the same company, friends who had not met for a long time, or a couple who were enjoying their date.

Rika reconfirmed her feelings which had not changed even after knowing the whole truth and experiencing an abnormal terrifying incident.

I definitely like Ashiya-san from the bottom of my heart.

However, no matter what, Rika was still unable to grab Ashiya's hand which was so close to her.

As it was during lunchtime, the two of them sat at the waiting seats for a while; Rika first lost her composure because their shoulders were too close to each other, and after the waiter showed them to their seats, because Ashiya took off his jacket to show the vest underneath, Rika's heartbeat started to accelerate and her emotions were thrown into chaos, causing her feel a little fatigued.

If this goes on, I might be unable to make a calm judgement when buying things later.

Just as Rika thought this.

"Hmm....."

Ashiya, who should have placed his order, was staring at the menu in a focused manner.

".....Ah."

Rika carelessly glanced at the prices on the menu and raised an eyebrow.

All the lunch items cost over 1000 yen. The most expensive one even reached 1800 yen.

Honestly, this was also considered a rather high priced lunch for Rika.

Furthermore, Rika already knew that Ashiya's financial situation was very tight.

"A-Ashiya-san, are you alright?"

Ashiya had looked up the store before, so he should already know about the

price.

However, when Rika thought about what happened when buying the television before, she could not help but worry if he was straining himself.

Considering the pride of the man who had initiated this meeting, Rika troubled over how to tell the other party in a sensitive way that he did not need to force himself to pay.

“Uh, actually.....”

Ashiya shook his head as he continued staring at the menu, and said something strange, “There was once when I had thought about how to cook this braised bigeye set meal at home at a similar cost.”

“Eh? At your home?”

“That’s right. For a price of one meal, 1200 yen looks rather expensive. However, if I want to make this at home, pushing down the costs is unexpectedly difficult.”

“Is, is that so?”

“Yes.”

Ashiya folded the menu properly and nodded with a serious expression.

“Firstly, a bigeye fish isn’t cheap in the first place. Fish have recently increased in price as well, assuming one piece of fish is 300 yen.”

“Yeah.”

“When coming to this kind of store, everyone will order something different. However, in most families, because of the considerations of equipment and effort, they won’t be able to do such a thing. I have three people at home, so three pieces of fish will be 900 yen. Not only does this place come with appetizers and miso soup, it even provides unlimited side dishes. Even the rice can be freely refilled. If you do this in a family with three guys, the rice will be used up quickly. And restaurants will sell a certain quantity of bigeye fish everyday, but it is impossible for normal families to eat similar things everyday. Thinking about this, one realises that the costs and labour needed to produce one bigeye meal are higher than expected. Therefore, I suddenly feel that 1200

yen is an unexpectedly reasonable price.”

“I see, I have never thought of things this way.”

Rika, who had been initially speechless, slowly eased her tension when she slowly saw the Ashiya she normally knew.

“Ah, I normally am very thrifty in various areas, but since it’s a rare occasion where Suzuki-san specially went out with me, I will not be bothered about this type of thing, please do not worry. After all, being thrifty normally is for the sake for occasions like this.”

“Hm, I understand. But you still have to control it so that it remains at the standard where Maou-san won’t get angry at you.”

“I will remember that. Then..... let me think about where I should start explaining.....”

“There’s no need to be so formal. I have already heard a lot about what happened after Urushihara-san came and things about Ente Isla. That’s right, I want to know what happened after Ashiya-san was captured.”

“About what happened after that? Thinking about it, I heard Sasaki-san say that you were in poor health for a while, was everything alright later?”

“I am a naturally cheerful person. Chiho-chan and Ooguro-san were also very concerned about me, you should be able to tell from how I was willing to go out with you after knowing the truth, right?”

“I see. Uh, because no matter how much I interrogated Gabriel and the people from Josuikin, they were unwilling to tell me anything about Suzuki-san, so I was truly worried. Actually.....”

After that Ashiya started talking about what happened after he was taken away by Gabriel and the parts which were related to Emi being confined in Ente Isla.

Rika listened with a calm smile.

Though some of the content was too intense, in the end, all of the people important to Rika were safe, so she could look forward to hearing about the mysteries which Ashiya could not reveal before and from there, as well as hear

about and understand the information held by Emi's mother.

"The process may have been painful, but everyone is moving forward step by step."

"When the Demon King Army was still going strong, I have never thought that this day would come."

"One year ago, I would have never expected that I would be seriously listening to someone talking about this kind of thing."

Not long after, the food which they had ordered arrived. The topic then shifted to cooking, Ashiya's daily life, Rika's life, and things which happened at Rika's workplace after Emi left, both of them chatted greatly about random topics.

Rika may have friends like Emi or her colleague Shimizu Maki who she can chat and eat happily with, but the happiness felt from this lunch date was of a completely different nature.

Not only was Ashiya good at expanding topics, he was good at listening as well.

It was interesting how Ashiya became talkative once he started talking about Maou and Urushihara, his battle with Emi, and the Demon King Army in the past.

"Anyway, considering Urushihara's problem, I need to lower the call charges as much as possible."

Considering Urushihara's habit of wastage when buying things matched Ashiya's usual behaviour as well.

The secret behind owning this suit which did not look like something a Demon King Army would have was also revealed in this conversation.

It was something which had happened not long before the Demon King joined MgRonalds.

Considering that they might have to work in a job where wearing a suit was required, Maou and Ashiya bought one suit each at a specialised western suit store during a promotion where the second set was priced at 1000 yen.

In the end, Maou and Ashiya did not get a job which required wearing suits, so these two suits were normally kept in the closet together with moth balls.

Going slightly off track, Ashiya also mentioned that he also had black and white neckties at home for occasions like weddings and funerals.

"It was a problem with the store, but because of my rather large build, there were limited suits which could fit me, so I had no choice but have Demon King-sama wear the 1000 yen suit, I still regret it now."

"That can't be helped. For these kinds of clothes, just being a little taller will make the price increase by 1000 yen, for suits, the actual price should be around 20,000 or 30,000 yen."

"Thinking about it, this time may be the first time I will spend so much money on buying something for myself after the suit."

"If so, making a good choice has just become more important. Then, do you prefer any models or companies?"

"No, it's embarrassing, but I have no idea about this at all....."

"I see. Actually, compared to the time when we went to buy the television, the plans introduced by every company have changed a little. The mobile phone functions used by Ashiya-san the most are....."

After she had finished eating, Rika finally got used to Ashiya's appearance and took out a pen and notebook from her bag, going into work mode.

After that, Rika analysed the information she received from Ashiya-san and made a conclusion.

"So you wish for the price to be as low as possible. And as long as there is a call function, you will be able to use it for that thing called 'Idea Link'. So you're not picky about the model. Your main use is making calls and you won't make long calls. The ones you would send messages to would be the people connected to the apartment. You currently don't have plans to move out of the main city area. You normally don't have the habit of downloading games or music. But you might frequently use the internet. From what I've just said, there shouldn't be anything I have to correct, right?"

“Yes.”

“Okay, I understand. After listening to this, I am starting to feel that it would be good if Emi also helped by giving advice when Maou-san was changing his phone before..... sigh, but I’m not familiar with *ae* either, and it seems like Maou-san had been using the services from this service provider for a long time, there should be other reasons why he chose a flip phone too.”

After inspecting her notebook a few times, Rika spoke.

“Ashiya-san, if you had to pay in full, what is your rough budget?”

“Pay in full?” Ashiya replied in confusion. “About that, I would be able to take out 50,000 yen at most..... but I heard that installment payment is mostly used to pay for this kind of thing.”

“That’s true, but that is because the current prices of the phones alone are very high. Many people pay the monthly contract fees in installments, but with this arrangement, the minimal amount which needs to be paid every month will be 6000 yen.”

“6000 yen..... every month?” Ashiya said with a dark expression. “Demon King-sama’s monthly call fees are around 4000 yen, so I had thought that the costs would be almost the same.....”

“I don’t know when he bought the phone, but since Emi had paid for the phone first, then the fees every month wouldn’t include the installment payments, right? There is no need for a flip phone to transmit huge amounts of data, so it’s about that price. However, if we assume that a phone which costs 50,000 yen is paid in installments on a 24 month plan, the fees every month will total to slightly more than 2000 yen. Ashiya-san is applying for a new number as well, so there is no discount for re-contracting and changing phones, Maou-san is not your family member, so you cannot use the family plan. No matter how we try to reduce the fees, 6000 yen per month is already a very optimistic estimate. Depending on the phone model and the amount of usage, the fees might be a little higher.”

“Ugh.....”

“Which is why I asked you, do you want to consider paying for the phone in

full first?"

"Eh?"

"Simply put, it is a way to push down the monthly call fees to less than 3000 yen as long as you buy it together with the phone. It's just that this method is not commonly used."

"Not commonly used, does it refer to having to operate some difficult electronic equipment?"

"No. It's just that this method of contracting is still not popular in Japan. In addition, because it can only be used on Slimphones, it is rather difficult for some people. Moreover, paying it in full is a very high cut off point, and doing it this way means that people are not able to use the message services provided by the telecommunications service operator. People who use their phones for a long time will then be lazy to change to this kind of plan. Just based on this, as long as Ashiya-san is able to overcome the price of the phone, you'll be able to use it immediately."

"I don't understand that well, but is Suzuki-san able to enjoy this convenience because you are an employee?"

"It's not like that. I am not a permanent employee, as long as you're willing to do your research, anyone is able to use this kind of plan, the features provided and service level don't become bad because the fees are cheap."

"If so, why isn't it that common to do so?" Ashiya asked in a confused manner.

"Because it's not widely advertised, the history of Japan's telecommunications industry is also rather special when compared to what it's like overseas. Moreover, Japan only started to introduce this kind of service recently, so it will still be some time before it becomes commonplace. There might be many reasons, but I don't think these are things which Ashiya-san needs to worry about. After that, it just depends on whether you have the money to pay it all in full. If you're unable to pay the fees in full at one go, perhaps we can try to find cheaper plans for you by limiting the types of usage....."

“No, lowering the burden on our finances is the Demon Fortress’s justice. Since this method can make the monthly contract fees become so cheap and Suzuki-san said that there was no problem, there is no reason not to use this kind of plan.”

“I understand. If there are no issues with the budget, let’s first go to Docodemo’s phone retail shop to take a look.”

“So it is Docodemo’s contract model after all?”

Rika thought about how to explain to Ashiya who was not well versed in telecommunication technologies.

“Strictly speaking, it is not. But generally speaking, you can’t say that it is not either..... have you heard of SIM-Free?”

“SIM-Free?”

“Let’s walk and talk. Then it’s about time to.....”

Rika got up from her seat, and based on her usual habit, she planned to pick up the bill at the corner of the table—

“Ah, leave this to me.”

—and made contact with Ashiya’s arm as he quickly snatched the bill away.

“Eh? Ah? B-But?”

“I invited you out today for the sake of apologising to you, and I am still troubling you to help me later on. Let me pay for this.”

“.....A-alright.....”

Rika was finally able to regain her usual composure by discussing mobile phones, yet her emotions were messed up again in one go; she let go without any protest.

Ashiya nodded in satisfaction, put on his suit jacket and walked towards the counter with the bill.

Seeing that back, as if Rika was trying to tightly hug the larger male hands and feel the rougher skin texture, she clenched her right hand which had touched Ashiya and placed it against her chest.

“Ah, it’s already getting dark.”

“It’s only 5pm though.”

The two of them walked out of the electronics store at almost 5pm.

Ashiya, who took action quickly once he had made his decision, bought a Docodemo Slimphone which was an older model but did not have a SIM card lock, paying for the phone in full according to Rika’s suggestions.

After that, the electronics store, acting as a proxy, helped them to sign a telecommunications contract with the telecommunications company, and with this, Ashiya smoothly obtained a Docodemo SIM-Free contractless phone.

However, the road ahead was still long.

Ashiya, who had not touched any electronics other than home appliances, the calculator, and the television, suddenly had a Slimphone.

When the store employee said that they could download the PDF format of the manual if they were unsure of the usage methods in detail, Ashiya’s face suddenly became pale.

Seeing this, Rika judged that Ashiya would be unable to use the mobile phone which he had finally bought if this continued, so she brought Ashiya to the café located on the floor above the electronics store, turned on the phone and started to slowly teach him how to use it.

During the process of teaching, Rika added her own name, phone number, and email address to the front of the phonebook.

Ashiya did not think that there was any special meaning to it, but Rika still felt it was a happy mistake.

Rika’s heart which had been beating extremely quickly from touching the arm when taking the bill started to decrease back to a normal rate during the process of guiding Ashiya to use the phone and discussing phones.

Including the appropriately scheduled breaks in between, Ashiya spent two

hours before he had finally learned how to make calls, send messages, pull out and add new phone numbers, and how to use the map and train schedule applications.

“You might be more knowledgeable than Maou-san on how to use mobile phones now!”

“Not considering Demon King-sama, since we’re going to compete on the same field of Slimphones, I don’t plan to lose to Emilia.”

It was not known what kind of battle Ashiya wanted to have in this field, but acting so confident and growing dizzy with success after just learning how to use the map application was really interesting.

This figure that was filled with so much motivation was like an overgrown child.

However, this dreamlike happy time suddenly reached its end.

“I’m sorry for causing you so much trouble. I am truly thankful for today.”

Five o’clock in the evening. The sky had turned dark blue.

It was the time when househusbands should prepare to go home and handle domestic affairs for the family.

“.....It’s no trouble, it’s good that I could be of help.”

Ashiya had already mentioned before that he needed to return home in the evening.

Rika had thought that noon to evening was a very long time.

Unexpectedly, 5pm, which had seemed like a very long time while at work, had arrived so quickly.

“You really helped me a lot. If Suzuki-san was not around, forget about buying a mobile phone on my own, I might not have even been able to set the correct settings”

“Yeah.”

Rika nodded.

“Suzuki-san stays at Takadanobaba, right? If you do not mind, please allow me

to escort you.....”

“No, it’s fine. There aren’t any dangerous places on the way, and Ashiya-san needs to go home, right?”

“I see. However, at least allow me to walk you to the ticketing gate at the station.....”

Starting to walk while speaking, Ashiya’s hand was still far away from Rika after all.

However, the ticketing gate of the station was very close.

It felt like they had gone to many places, but the two of them were less than ten minutes away from Shinjuku station.

When they reached the location where they had met up at the start, Rika’s feelings at this time were the same as when she was young and had just returned from an excursion.

The fun activity ending, saying goodbye to her friends one by one on the way home, and in the end, being the only one left, feeling an indescribable sense of loneliness.

The subtle feeling of not wanting this time to end.

Even if this feeling would mysteriously disappear once she reached home, the journey home was still difficult to bear.

Of course, it was not as if Rika would not see Ashiya again, rather than that, since she already knew the truth, it was not unreasonable to say that the distance between them had decreased.

However, would she still have another chance in the future to go out with Ashiya like this?

The two of them lived in different areas, and to be more exact, even the worlds which they came from were different.

At this moment, Rika suddenly remembered a face.

The face everyone had mentioned before.

Did that child not choose to stay by the side of these people on her own, just

with her own will and determination?

“!!”

Rika stopped in front of the ticketing gate, Ashiya also showed a surprised expression because she suddenly spoke loudly.

“Erhm..... can you accompany me..... for some time?”

“O-oh? Uh, alright, if it’s not for a long time.”

“Then..... then, can you..... hear me out for a bit?”

“You have something to say to me? Should we find someplace quieter?”

“No, this place is fine.”

The evening crowd of people getting off work started to spill into the plaza in front of the west exit ticketing gate.

“Can I ask you something strange?”

“What is it? If you want to discuss about strange things, I really asked you and said many strange things today.”

“This can’t be helped. It’s your first time using it, so you’re a beginner. Then again, what I wanted to ask is not about this kind of thing.”

Rika may have smiled on reflex, but after looking up and seeing Ashiya’s expression, Rika’s instincts told her that Ashiya had only used this sentence to soothe her anxiety because she looked troubled.

“No, the, the strange thing I want to talk about..... erhm, is related to Emi.....”

“Emilia?”

Yeah. She is a mixed blood of human and angel, right?”

“It seems so.”

“In other words, in Ente Isla, humans and angels..... can get married, right?”

“It should be that way. It’s just that, unlike in Japan, they do not have to go through complex processes like registering at the Household Registration Office or changing their last names.”

“T-Then.....”

Rika's heat rate reached its highest rate for today, beating so quickly that it was scary.

As Rika apologised in her heart for using her friend in order to match the topic she was going to bring up, she asked in a shaky voice, "Can demons and humans..... be together?"

".....Uh."

Even Ashiya became speechless because of Rika's sudden change in topic.

He sucked in the corners of his mouth slightly, as if he was considering how to handle Rika's question.

".....To be honest, I do not know."

After troubling over it for a while, Ashiya replied in a cautious tone.

"In terms of stature, body shape, number and shape of organs, demons are different from humans and angels, but there are still great differences between clans and individuals. If it is clans who are very close to humans in shape, there might be a possibility, but I do not know any concrete examples, so I am unable to confirm this....."

Next, as if Ashiya felt that it was difficult for him to say this, he shook his head and said, "Actually, with regards to humans and demons, I had some thoughts about this recently, so hearing this question from Suzuki-san was a little surprising."

"Eh?"

"It is with regards to Sasaki-san."

"Chiho-chan.....?"

Ashiya mentioned Chiho's name with a heavy expression, causing Rika to have a bad feeling.

"Sasaki-san knows about all our past history since a long time ago, but she still harbours positive feelings towards Demon King-sama. However, because everyone is starting to suspect that Demon King-sama may be too dependent on Sasaki-san's feelings, a small conflict occurred at the apartment."

“Maou-san is dependent on Chiho-chan?”

“Sasaki-san is an intelligent person, therefore even when she is interacting with Demon King-sama, she will definitely not act based on her feelings or become blinded by them. She continues to interact with us with the thorough understanding of the anger and hatred felt by Emilia and the humans of Ente Isla, so she frequently stands on the side of Emilia and the others. However, once the relations between Demon King-sama and Emilia breakdown again, will Sasaki-san still choose to support Demon King-sama.....”

“Eh, that’s hard to say.”

Rika interrupted.

“Demon King-sama won’t assume this, would he?”

“.....Uh, eh?”

“Simply put, towards Bell who was still not used to life in Japan, to Suzuki-san who was recently involved in our commotion, and Emilia who was dragged into the ruse of Ente Isla, Demon King-sama would courteously show his concern. However, he is negligent to do so only with Sasaki-san. Demon King-sama said he does show concern for her in the workplace with his position as her superior, but Sasaki-san’s magnanimity has also provided him with a lot of help outside of the workplace as well, Demon King-sama seems to be lacking awareness in this aspect.”

Since Ashiya had said so, it meant that he felt very sure about this.

“Looking at it in a positive way, it is complete trust. Looking at it in a negative way, Demon King-sama lowers his guard completely only when he is around Sasaki-san to the point where he can be seen as being dependent on her. And this may have started since a long time ago..... since Urushihara appeared in Japan as an enemy.”

“What you mean is, since the battle with Urushihara-san ended, only Chiho-chan was treated differently from other people?”

“That is correct. Only Sasaki-san’s memories were left intact by Demon King-sama. I have felt that it was inconceivable since that time. Since that time, Demon King-sama clearly saw Sasaki-san as a special existence. And that kind of

relationship has continued until now. So, I have been thinking this recently. What I am going to say next, I hope you can keep it a secret.....”

Ashiya placed his hand under his chin in a serious manner and said, “If Demon King-sama chooses Sasaki-san as a partner..... in other words, decides to marry her, how would the situation turn out?”

“M-m-m-marry her?”

Having such a realistic term appear so suddenly, Rika got a huge shock.

“I have only thought this much with regards to this topic..... however I am also unable to guess what Demon King-sama is thinking, so I had originally planned to think about it again only when things have really developed to that stage..... what were we talking about originally?”

“.....Ah, uh, erhm, it was about whether demons and humans can get married.”

“Ah, that’s right, that’s right. Then, what about that.....”

“Yeah, erhm.....”

After unexpectedly hearing such a concrete and realistic explanation, it became easier to handle.

It became easier to say.

So Rika went with the flow and said it.

“Just like Chiho-chan towards Maou-san, I..... have feelings towards you.”

“Yeah..... hm?”

After Ashiya nodded like he usually did, he froze suddenly.

“That, erhm.....”

“I like you..... as a woman towards a man.”

“.....Suzuki-san, but, I.....”

“I know. I can understand Chiho-chan’s feelings very well now. I am not hoping that you will enter a relationship with me, or marry me. I just felt that I have to convey this to you, I want to convey this to you. I hope you can notice

me."

Rika focused and filtered out all noise other than herself and Ashiya.

"Did I cause trouble for you?"

"....."

With a stern expression, Ashiya stared at Rika, who had a similar stern expression.

The moment both their intersecting gazes were about to separate, Ashiya took out his new mobile phone in his pocket.

"Please give me a moment."

"Yeah."

Ashiya opened up the phone book function with rather stiff movements, placed the phone next to his ear and made the call.

".....So slow. Since you're glued to the computer the whole day, then pick up quicker. It's me. Alsiel. Yeah, I bought it. Remember to register this number. I will be back later than usual. Demon King-sama will also work until late at night, so settle your dinner however you like if you're hungry. Hm..... it can't be helped, do whatever you want. However, clean up properly after you have eaten. Goodbye."

Rika immediately knew that the person Ashiya was explaining things to was Urushihara, staying home at Villa Rosa Sasazuka.

"It seems like I am more shaken up than I expected. Actually allowing Urushihara to order pizza so easily."

".....I'm really sorry about that."

Other than that, Rika did not know how else to reply.

Ashiya sighed lightly, kept the phone into his pocket and looked towards Rika.

"Can you..... come with me for a while?"

Leading Rika along, Ashiya first went down to the underpass.

From the direction, it seemed like he was heading towards the Metropolitan Building.

The two of them passed through the crowd which was mostly walking in the opposite direction went out of the other side of the underpass a short time later to arrive in the middle of the skyscraper area.

Ashiya stopped walking and surveyed his surroundings for a while.

“Please come this way.”

Then he led Rika to a place quite some distance away from the road.

The wind around west Shinjuku, occupied by the highrise buildings of huge enterprises and first grade restaurants, was very strong.

Perhaps it was just her imagination, but Rika felt that the wind here was colder than when they left the electronics store.

“Where is this?”

The place where Ashiya stood was the outdoor area of a café which was already closed for the day, located in between two high rise buildings.

Perhaps the store had closed for the day once it was after office hours. There was no one around at all.

Ashiya turned his head towards Rika who was feeling confused, and did something completely unexpected.

“Suzuki-san, pardon me.”

“Eh? Ah, wah!”

After Rika’s hand was grabbed, she was pulled towards Ashiya.

This action alone was enough for Rika’s heart to feel like it was going to explode, but things did not end there.

Her feet left the ground.

When Rika came to her senses, she was being bridal carried by Ashiya.

“Whatttt, Ashiya-san, w-w-what is g-g-going on?”

"Please hold onto me. And clench your jaw as well, so you won't bite your tongue."

"Eh, what do you mean by hold onto my tongue....."

Rika did not carry out Ashiya's instructions which had been quietly spoken into her ear.

"Wahhhhhhhhhh?"

The next moment, Rika saw a scenery of Shinjuku which she had never seen before.

That was the sky.

"Kyahhhhhhhhhh?"

Rika's reaction was very normal for someone who was thrown into the sky, she grabbed the neck of Ashiya, who was supporting her.

"W-w-why, ehhhhh?"

"That's right, it's more stable this way. We're going to move a little, please maintain this position."

"Wahhhhh!"

They were flying.

She was being carried by Ashiya and flying through the skies of Shinjuku.

This should have been a movie or magic like romantic scene and situation, but suddenly being thrown into this situation and being a human who was unable to fly, Rika could only show a blank expression and grab Ashiya tightly.

The night scenery was beautiful. Being carried like a princess in the arms of the person she liked the most was also something to feel happy about.

However, suddenly being forced to face this height and cold, it was a bit too thrilling.

Rika was unable to enjoy this scene which all the girls in the world had dreamed about before, and when she regained her senses, she was put down on the roof of a building which was significantly taller than those surrounding it.

“Gasp..... gasp..... t-that, that was scary.....!”

“I’m sorry. Because I needed to move to a place where there aren’t any people around.”

“Where..... is this?”

“The roof of the Metropolitan Building.”

“Metropolitan Building?”

Rika, sweating cold sweat, surveyed her surroundings in surprise.

“W-why?”

“Because I wanted to find a spacious place without any people.”

After Ashiya replied with a smile, on the helicopter landing pad where strong winds were blowing, he started to walk away from Rika little by little.

“Ashiya-san?”

“Your feelings made me very happy.”

“Eh?”

“I was surprised as well. In the past, I had thought humans were a lowly race who should be cast aside, but when I knew about Suzuki-san’s feelings, I did not dislike it at all.”

The lights of Shinjuku at night were bright enough to cover the moonlight.

Ashiya’s figure started to disappear into the shadows.

“Regretfully, I am unable to respond to Suzuki-san’s feelings. Because.....”

That wind, just like the time in the shadows when Ashiya first invited Rika up here, was filled with a dark, heavy and cold aura.

From Rika’s point of view, Ashiya’s figure was completely hidden in the shadows, but this was impossible.

There isn’t anything on the roof of the Metropolitan Building which can block the moonlight, right?

However, she did not get a chance to deduce the reason behind the scene she was witnessing. The instant Ashiya was surrounded by the black shadows, a

wind stronger than before blew by.

“Ugh, ah!”

Rika, whose chest suddenly felt tight with pain, placed her hand on the ground to keep herself upright.

It was different from the sweet pain or the acceleration of her heartbeats from nervousness.

As if Rika was forced to drink poison or all the oxygen in the area had been removed, a pain she had never felt before overcame her.

“W-what is this.....”

“Because the man called Ashiya Shiro does not exist in this world.”

“Ugh?”

From the shadows which Ashiya disappeared into, Rika heard an unfamiliar voice.

It was low and resounding, a voice grating to the ears.

“Is it painful? This appearance and this power is my true state. Human. Everything that you have seen is just a temporary body and name used to hide in Japan, amongst the crowd.”

Rika, notwithstanding the pain with all her might and looking up, realised that the figure in front of her had grown significantly.

The gaze of the person who walked out of the shadows caused Rika’s body to shiver against her will.

That was a primal feeling which humans were still unable to abandon in the end—fear.

“My name is Alsiel. A Demon General who normal humans cannot even approach. If you do not wish to die, do not continue approaching me. Our demonic magic can easily take away the lives of weak humans.”

Standing there was a creature whose body was covered by a black armour like shell, a creature Rika had never seen before.

A creature covered in black armour, with two tails which were swaying

ominously, stared straight at Rika with eyes emitting a dark glow.

“A.....Ashiya, san.....”

“The humans of Ente Isla had submitted to me before because they were afraid of this appearance. In the future, we will also return to that land to make those people submit to us again.”

“Ugh..... uh, gasp!”

Because of the nausea and the tears which kept flowing, Rika finally collapsed on the ground.

“Do you understand? How idiotic you are, how deeply you have misunderstood, and how meaningless your feelings are?”

“Uuuu..... uugh.....”

Her joints started to creak just like the time she had a high fever.

It was already becoming difficult to look at the other party directly.

This is a demon?

She may have heard about them many times, but she had never actually seen a demon.

Existences which killed humans in a faraway world and planned to conquer them.

Rika withstood the terrifying pressure and fear weighing on her body, and thought this repeatedly.

“.....W.....why?”

“Don’t ask such a meaningless question. Of course, the reason is to make sure a mere human woman will never form stupid misunderstandings against us higher beings, the demons.”

“Why, do you have to show this appearance to me.....?!”

“.....What?”

“I had heard, that it would be painful, but I never expected it to be this bad. Ugh..... even if I want to move closer, I can’t do it. My legs, can’t move.....”

Even so, Rika still raised her head with all her might, and spoke before the terrifying demon could reply, "Thank you. For showing me your true self."

".....Ugh."

From Ashiya's aura, it could be sensed that he was wavering slightly.

"If you thought I had misunderstood, or, thought I was being bothersome.....
you can, erase my memories, right? I heard about that. But, why....."



“.....”

“It’s terrifying. Painful. I don’t think I can get close at all. Scary, it’s scary..... but.....” Rika did not wipe away the tears which she could not hold back and spoke to Alsiel directly, “.....even so, I still like you. No matter how much you try to scare me, or how much you say cruel things to make me stay away from you, I still know that you are very kind. So, I like you. This is not, some misunderstanding.”

“.....”

“You brought me here, so you would not..... make the people around you suffer. You specifically increased the distance between us, so that I would not be in any danger.”

Rika shouted.

While she was literally screaming, strangely the pain that she had felt at the beginning was dissipating.

“You showed me your true appearance to respond to my feelings seriously.”

Alsiel stared at Rika’s face, his expression unchanging.

Rika, who was shouting, may not have realised, but only Alsiel’s eyes were showing the slightest signs of wavering.

“I know. I know..... that you and I..... cannot become lovers..... but, I can still say it now. I like you. I like the you who is willing to use your power to reject me sincerely. Only this feeling, isn’t a misunderstanding.”

However, Rika had reached her limit.

“Thank you..... Alsiel-san.....”

At the last moment, the instant Rika imprinted the true appearance of the person who she liked—a citizen of a faraway world—into her mind, she lost consciousness.

※

“Then, when I woke up, I was already on a bench in Shinjuku Central Park. Ashiya-san had also changed back to his human appearance. He kept

apologising to me, and that made me feel very embarrassed instead. Rather than doing that, it would have been better to leave me there and disappear mysteriously, but he said that if something had happened to me, he would get killed by Emi, and he did not know how to apologise to me either. Anyway, he had changed back to the usual Ashiya-san without any of the overwhelming presence from the time he was Alsiel, I also felt rather embarrassed because of what I said before. Eh? Chiho-chan, you don't seem to be eating that much?"

"Yeah....."

Chiho could not care about her hunger at all, and could only feel awed at what Rika said.

On the other hand, Rika was piling up her plates continuously, making it difficult to imagine that she had just experienced a rejection which crossed worlds.

"It was funny, after turning into a demon, wouldn't his body increase in size? Ashiya-san said that he quickly took off his clothes before he changed so he would not damage the suit. I asked about his underwear on reflex and he actually replied that it was fine because it was elastic, causing me to laugh out loud on the spot. As expected of Ashiya-san."

"Yeah....."

"Then, I had just parted ways with him at Shinjuku station. I could have just gone home directly, but I really did not want to go back to my room harbouring the pain of rejection, so while I felt bad about it, I invited Chiho-chan out."

"Yeah....."

Holding the tea cup containing the already cold tea with both hands, Chiho could only nod.

"I have heard that demonic magic places a huge burden on the body, but it was only after I experienced it for myself did I know how bad it really was. Since just now, my joints are hurting, my stomach feels cold, I feel like throwing up and my whole body is sore. I only felt like I was recovering after I ate this much."

Rika may have said that she had recovered, but from her complexion, her

level of recovery was not that ideal.

In fact, the first time Chiho had ‘come into contact with demonic magic’, her body had felt uncomfortable until the very next day.

Chiho did not know if it was because Maou’s demonic magic was too strong because he was the Demon King, or if it was because she had come into contact with Maou’s, Ashiya’s, and Urushihara’s demonic magic, she at least knew that if she had not been under Emi’s protection, she would even have had difficulty breathing.

Afterwards, after Chiho went through Suzuno’s treatment and learned how to use spells, she did not experience any after effects. Even so, when she first made contact with the demonic magic of the Malebranches, she still felt a very short spurt of discomfort which agitated her nerves.

Without anyone protecting Rika, she had been exposed to the full brunt of demonic magic until she had lost consciousness.

The thing which Chiho felt was strange was that Ashiya had declared that ‘demonic magic was not needed in daily living’ after returning from Ente Isla, yet he had transformed in front of Rika.

This was only based on Chiho’s understanding, but Maou and the others probably needed a certain level of demonic magic within their bodies to be able to transform into their ‘demon forms’.

When Maou had first arrived in Japan, he seemed to have used a minimal amount of his remaining demonic magic to lay down the foundation needed to live in Japan, but at that time, he had already ‘lost his original form’, and fell into the human appearance Chiho was familiar with.

In other words, Ashiya had been storing an amount of demonic magic sufficient for him to transform in his body, and he had hidden this fact from everyone.

Of course, considering the incident with Gabriel which had happened in the past and that the information that Heaven had completely isolated itself could not be trusted, this was a situation where one should continue to be wary of their surroundings. However, if this was so, Ashiya should have told the others

directly.

However, from what Chiho observed, Maou and Urushihara did not seem to know about this.

No, perhaps they knew but intentionally made sure that Chiho would not sense it.

“.....”

Chiho immediately rejected this deduction.

After all, if Maou, Ashiya, and Urushihara had agreed to hide this, the action of Ashiya revealing his true self in front of Rika could not be explained.

Or was there a need to intentionally let Rika see this scary appearance in order to sever Rika's feelings?

If so, that would mean that Ashiya had already known about Rika's crush, and had specially prepared demonic magic for this purpose since the start.

However, this did not match Chiho's impression of Ashiya, and contradicted what Rika had said.

For Ashiya, Rika's confession today was unexpected.

Ashiya was a kind man, so even if he was unable to reciprocate Rika's feelings, he still made an effort to use demonic magic and showed Rika a scary attitude to give her a reason to give up on her feelings.

It would be better to believe what Rika had said. Analysing it from this angle would better match Chiho's impression of Ashiya.

However, with this, Chiho could not figure out 'the reason Ashiya acted this way' at all.

Ashiya should be aware of how good the relations were between Rika and Emi, and Chiho and Suzuno.

If Rika told them that Ashiya had enough demonic magic hidden away to transform, Emi and Suzuno who had finally relaxed their attitudes would definitely be guarded around the demons once more.

There were no advantages in having Maou and the others become enemies

with Emi and the rest.

She could not figure it out.

Just as Chiho felt an indescribable sense of uneasiness, Rika sighed with force.

"Ah~ I'm so full. The food here is really delicious. In this age, we can't even look down on 100 yen sushi."

"Ah, that's great....."

"Sigh..... ah."

After Rika stacked up a total of 15 plates, she exhaled exaggeratedly, then brewed her tea again.

Chiho may have felt very hungry originally, but as what Rika had said was too shocking, she had only eaten five plates.

"Hey, Chiho-chan."

"Yes?"

"Do your best."

"Eh?"

".....Ugpuh."

Rika picked up the sixteenth plate from the conveyer belt. She already looked very stuffed, but she still delivered the seafood salad to her mouth.

"E-erhm, Suzuki-san, are you forcing yourself to eat?"

"I want to eat."

"Eh?"

As she spoke, Rika picked up a seventeenth plate.

No matter what, this did not seem like the normal amount of food eaten by the slim Rika.

"If I do not do it, I will be unable to bear it. Chiho-chan should keep me company too. I'm treating today."

"Ah, no, how can I do that?"

“Please. It’s only with this that I cannot ask Emi to keep me company.”

As Rika stuffed the food into her mouth, she reached out for an eighteenth plate.

“In the end, I still do not understand. Even if Ashiya-san had accepted my feelings, I would definitely be unable to do anything. Ashiya-san has a future he wants to pursue, and this future is not something which I, a normal person who he coincidentally met in Japan would be able to catch up to..... but.....”

“Suzuki-san.....”

After placing the eighteenth plate on the table, Rika lowered her head.

“But, strangely..... although there is no basis at all..... I’ve always felt that Chiho-chan might be able to catch up to the future Maou-san wants to pursue. If it’s starting from now..... if it is Chiho-chan who can still freely choose your future.....”

“Freely choose my future..... eh?”

Chiho, unable to deduce Rika’s intentions, could not help but stand up immediately because she had noticed something.

“I may look like this, but I am actually burdened with quite a lot of things.”

“Suzuki-san?”

“Sorry, I have worked hard, but after my stomach was filled, I feel, a lot better. The food here, is really delicious.....”

“D-Don’t cry, Suzuki-san, it’s not like that, because I.....”

“Sorry, I am older, yet I’m showing such a weak side of me, eating non-stop in such a defeatist manner because I got dumped, then crying like this, sorry.”

“Ugh.....”

Chiho immediately got up from the opposite seat and rushed to Rika’s side.

“It’s alright, it’s alright.”

Chiho hugged Rika’s shoulders tightly.

“Sorry, Chiho-chan, I, although Chiho-chan, must be having a hard time as

well."

"It's alright. It's alright."

"Uuuu..... uuuuuu."

Rika leaned towards Chiho slightly and spoke with gritted teeth,

"It would be good, if he could just say..... it directly, that he no longer wanted to see me again..... with that, I would be able to give up easily....."

".....Because Ashiya-san is a kind person."

"He's too kind..... since he was able to go so far, why did he..... have to worry about my health, so frantically....."

"Seriously, that really suits Ashiya-san's personality."

"I like him..... even now, I still like him....."

Chiho hugged Rika quietly until she calmed down.

It was close to 8pm when she bade goodbye to Rika.

When the two of them parted ways, Rika had already calmed down and made her way home after apologising to Chiho repeatedly. From the back of the figure who disappeared deep into the station, the kind older sister who would normally leisurely tease Chiho and Emi could not be seen at all.

"Suzuki-san....."

Kaori had advised Chiho to face her feelings bravely and sort them out.

However, Rika had faced her feelings directly, suffered a heavy blow, and was still unable to sort out her feelings properly.

It was scary.

She did not feel this way during the confession at all, but when the answer did come, would there be a decisive divergence in her relationship with Maou?

"What should I do?"

If Rika was unable to overcome these feelings, would she avoid coming to Sasazuka from now on, or not meet Ashiya again?

It felt rather wrong.

For a person bravely facing their feelings, would they still want to stay by Ashiya's side even if they could not form a union with him?

Wouldn't that person break down because they were not able to touch him even if they stayed by his side?

No matter how Chiho thought about it, she could not find an answer.

"Eh? Chiho? What are you doing at this time?

"Wah?"

At this moment, someone called out to Chiho from behind, giving her a shock.

"A-Acies-chan?"

Standing there was Acies=Ara, eating a chocolate popsicle despite the weather being cold and carrying a plastic bag filled with snacks.

"Are you going home from work?"

"N-No, I just happened to be eating out, and am preparing to go home....."

"Eat? Now? Can I come along?"

Chiho had already said that she had eaten, and Acies, with her greedy personality, still asked this. Chiho smiled in a half stunned, half relieved manner.

"Unfortunately, I am already full. And if Acies-chan runs off somewhere else after this, the popsicles will melt."

Chiho pointed at the chocolate popsicle Acies was sucking on, and Acies nodded as if she had just noticed it.

"Hm, that's true."

"Did Acies-chan go out alone?"

Chiho surveyed her surroundings but did not notice Maou, Nord or Amane, the people who were responsible for taking care of her.

“No, I’m not alone.”

“Eh?”

Chiho had not seen any of the others, yet Acies said she was not alone, causing Chiho to freeze.

“I went out for dinner today and was preparing to go home after that, but unexpectedly, Amane and Iron actually got lost, so I have been looking for them since just now.”

“Ugh!”

Chiho understood the whole situation once she had heard this, she silently took out her phone, and dialled Amane’s phone number, which she had registered in case of emergency situations.

“Oh, Chiho! Did you encounter Acies?”

Amane, who picked up only after one ring, guessed Chiho’s intentions as she gasped for air.

“Yeah, at the ticketing gate in front of Sasazuka Station. Yeah, alright, no problem, I’ll wait for you.”

Chiho replied with a troubled smile and hung up after arranging with Amane that she would detain Acies until Amane came.

“Maou should buy me a mobile phone, even if it was just for the sake of situations like this.”

“Ahaha.....”

It was not known if Acies was aware that she was lost, after Chiho ended the call, Acies declared this in a classic demonstration of being ‘thick skinned’.

“Then again, Chiho, were you with someone just now? I seemed to have smelled Rika’s scent.”

Chiho widened her eyes in surprise.

She had been with Rika just now, but she did not expect that Acies would guess it from the smell.

“Y-You can actually determine that..... ah.”

Because she had replied carelessly from being too shocked, Chiho started to feel anxious.

Acies may have been staying at Shiba's house next to the apartment, but she still went to the various rooms frequently. If Acies had met Emi when Emi came to pick up Alas=Ramus and said that Rika and Chiho were together, things might not turn out well.

Rika would eventually tell Emi about what had happened today, but if Acies told Emi this before Rika's emotions had settled, Emi would probably worry about it.

"E-erhm, Acies-chan. About Suzuki-san coming over to Sasazuka, can you keep quiet about it? You can't tell Yusa-san even if she does go to the apartment later."

"Eh? Why?"

How should she phrase it such that Acies would understand?

Even if Chiho told Acies that it was a secret, it felt like Acies would say something like "Rika and Chiho met, but this is a secret, so I can't tell you!" Therefore, Chiho definitely could not tell Acies the truth.

Basically, Acies did not have bad intentions, yet her lips were very loose.

"T-Tomorrow, Lailah-san is going to play host since we're visiting her house."

Chiho racked her brains to think of an explanation which would not cause any troubles even if Acies let things slip.

"Mother's home? Oh~ she has a home."

Lailah may be an archangel with an unclear true identity, but having a home should be normal.

"Then, erhm, Suzuki-san normally looks for Yusa-san to discuss her troubles, but Yusa-san has been busy handling Lailah-san's issues recently, so Suzuki-san came to look for me today."

During this period of time, Acies continued to chew on the popsicle, nodding happily.

“Suzuki-san will definitely talk about it with Yusa-san soon, so, please help me keep this a secret for a while.”

“Yeah! Since it’s like that, then there’s no choice! I’ll help you keep a secret!”

“Ahaha..... I’m counting on you.”

“But talking about this. Emi and Rika might be like this as well, but if there is something you want to say, it would be better to say it earlier so there won’t be any regrets. I know that you should have your own reasons, but seeing you like this, I feel really worried sometimes.”

“Eh? What do you mean?”

“Hm? I was also separated from my older sister for a long time, so I want to say everything before I am unable to convey it, and try everything which I want to eat!”

“Before you’re unable to convey it.....”

The last part of the sentence was a little strange, but this sentence Acies said nonchalantly had a heavy significance to Chiho’s current situation.

“Has Acies..... ever encountered a situation in which you are unable to convey what you want to say?”

“A little.”

Acies used her thumb and index finger to gesture out a distance using measurements which Chiho did not understand.

“Sigh, even so, I still reunited with my older sister in the end. Even if one chance was lost, it does not mean that there will never be a second chance. However, before the second chance comes, it would be an arduous wait.”

“.....Hm, I see.”

“Exactly! So Chiho should also properly say what you should say, and properly eat what you should eat! Come! Let me give you one!”

“T-Thanks.”

Chiho could not follow the flow of the conversation, but Acies pushed a bubblegum into Chiho’s hands.

“Ah! How nostalgic. So they’re still selling this!”

Considered a cheap snack, inside the box with a drawing of an orange on it were four sphere shaped bubblegum sweets.

“Mi-chan said they have shrunk in size when compared to the past, does Chiho know about this as well?”

“Yeah, I liked this orange flavour a lot.”

When Chiho was young, there was a period of time when she craved for bubblegums, and the first bubblegum which she had pestered her mother into buying was this one. She had not expected that she would remember this at this time.

After that, her parents would buy this for her once they had the chance, and she would happily blow them into bubbles. However, at some unknown time, she started to lose interest in bubblegums and no longer paid attention to these things.

How long has it been since the last time she ate this orange bubblegum which had once been her favourite?

“Without being aware of it, I have also changed.”

Chiho did not know if this was growth, or simple change.

The only thing she was sure of was that she had once again remembered her yearnings from when she was little, and during the time which had passed before reuniting with this yearning, Chiho had subconsciously classified this yearning as something of the past.

“I don’t want it to turn into something of the past.”

“Hmm?”

Chiho gripped the bubblegum box tightly, and said with a smile, “Thank you, Acies-chan. I have cheered up a little.”

“Is that so? I don’t really understand, but since it’s like that, you can take some more. The more you eat, the more spirited you will be.”

“Eh? Ah, there’s no need to give me so much!”

"There's no need to be so reserved about it! It's not like it's my money anyway!"

"That makes me feel like returning this! T-Thank you, that's enough already!"

Acies said something eviler than what Urushihara would say, and in the end, Chiho had accepted three boxes of bubblegum, two boxes of milk sweets, and five chocolate popsicles.

Since it was kept in a shopping bag, that meant that everything had been paid for, but because it was difficult to imagine that Maou would allow Acies to possess money, Shiba or Nord may have helped pay for it.

Just as Chiho was thinking of such things, she noticed that Amane was briskly walking towards them from the other side of the station area while holding Iron's hand.

"Chiho! You're a lifesaver! Are you on your way home?"

"Hello, Amane-san. Yes, I was eating dinner with friends today....."

"I see. Anyway, thanks for your help. Hey, Acies! Didn't I tell you not to wander around on your own? Eh, what's with these popsicles and snacks?"

"She seemed to have bought it using the allowance given to her by someone."

"Spending it so easily, if it's not Nord or Lailah, it's probably Aunt Miki-T!"

Chiho had a similar opinion as well. Based on the bubblegum, it must have been Shiba this time.

"Unbelievable. I had never expected that the shop manager would come out to make us stop at an all-you-can-eat restaurant!"

"O-Oh....."

She had already eaten until the shop manager at the all-you-can-eat restaurant told her to stop, and yet still had the capacity to continue eating popsicles and snacks, causing Chiho to feel awed at Acies once again.

"Perhaps it would be better if we switched to the kind of stores which give you a reward if you finish their extra large meals."

Amane sighed tiredly, but it felt like even if they did this, Acies might just

leave a little bit of that meal left because of her bad habits, causing her to be unable to reach her goal of finishing it.

"Anyway, the both of you should go back to the apartment. Chiho, thanks a lot! Because I have to bring these two back, I can't accompany you home, please be careful on the way home."

"See you, Chiho."

"See you, bye bye."

"Goodbye everyone. Acies, thank you!"

The distantly related Sephirah left just like a tornado and Chiho sighed as she watched their backs.

Chiho pitied Amane, but seeing Acies's and Iron's happy figures, Chiho tried to imagine how much time had passed before these two could smile and laugh together, conveying their intentions to each other.

Though she was unable to convey her feelings to the other party right now, Chiho also wanted to properly see these things become a part of the past.

She did not want to stand by and do nothing at all, allowing these things to become nostalgic things of the past when remembering them in the future.

"Let's see what happens after I work hard?"

To Chiho, Rika was a brilliant older sister figure.

With a strong will, Rika carried out something which Chiho had always felt troubled over. She did not subconsciously send her feelings to be part of the past.

"Then again, what should I do about these things? I don't have a bag with me....."

Just as Chiho was troubling about how she should bring these snacks home—

"Chiho? What are you doing here?"

"Eh? Mum!"

Her mother, Riho, coincidentally came out of the ticketing gate, looking surprised.

"You naughty daughter, hanging around outside at this time. What's with these snacks?"

The mother picked up a box of milk sweets from her daughter with a wry smile.

"How nostalgic. I remember the first thing you whined for was this milk sweet. So they're still selling it after all."

"Eh? What? Wasn't it bubblegum?"

"You were especially greedy since quite early on, so you have pestered us about most sweets."

"Eh..... is that so?"

"Then? Have you eaten dinner? You don't plan to eat only snacks, right?"

"Yeah, um, a friend just happened to invite me for dinner, so we went to eat at that conveyer sushi store."

"Oh my, the child who used to feel really happy from just receiving a milk sweet has now become a rich person who will go eat sushi on her own. This means I can look forward to the next Mother's Day."

"Eh, hm? O-oh."

Chiho showed an ambiguous smile, put the snacks into her mother's bag, and feeling much better, she headed home, chatting with her mother the whole time.

※

"Ah, Emi! You've worked hard!"

"Acies? Why are you outside at this time?"

Emi, who had just got off from work, asked this in surprise after meeting Acies, carrying a shopping bag, in front of the apartment.

"When Amane, Iron, and I went out for dinner, we met Chiho at the station and chatted for a while."

"With Chiho-chan, at this hour?"

Chiho should not have any work shifts today, what was she doing outdoors at this time?

“Where is older sister at today?”

“At Bell’s place. Because Alsiel needs to go out this afternoon for some business and the Demon King has work today.”

“I see. I have something to ask her, so can I go and bother Suzuno for a bit?”

“Eh? I think it should be fine..... but it would be better to ask first.”

With Acies following behind Emi, the two of them went upstairs.

The lights inside Room 201 were still on, and hearing snippets of Ashiya and Urushihara talking from within, Emi deduced that the date between Ashiya and Rika had already ended and nodded lightly.

Emi was unable to obtain any information from outside, but what did Rika say in the end, and how did Ashiya react?

She was filled with uneasiness, but right now, Emi had to fetch Alas=Ramus first.

“Bell, Alas=Ramus. It’s me, I’m back.”

“Is it Emilia?”

“Mama! Welcome back!”

The responses of Suzuno and Alas=Ramus could be heard from the other side of the door.

“Bell, Acies said that she had something to ask you, can you let her in?”

“Hm? What’s wrong?”

Suzuno opened the door in response, and after recognising Acies standing behind Emi, she invited the two of them inside.

“Did Acies go to work too?”

“No, onee-san. I went to buy snacks which you aren’t able to eat yet.”

“Snacks, I want!”

“Hey, Acies, it’s late right now, don’t show Alas=Ramus any snacks.”

"Eh~ it's too late to say that....."

"No, Alas=Ramus, you can only eat snacks tomorrow."

"Ahm."

Ever since Emi had heard that Acies and Iron ate about 5000 yen worth of MgRonalds meals, she became neurotic with regards to Alas=Ramus's diet.

So that Alas=Ramus does not become a glutton child like Acies and Iron, Emi had become rather strict recently.

"Alas=Ramus. Your Mama is saying this because I don't want you to get cavities. You have to bear with it, okay?"

"Uuuu..... Acies is eating."

Unable to accept Suzuno's explanation, Alas=Ramus made a rare show of pouting.

It seemed like she was unsatisfied that Acies, as her younger sister, could do it, yet she, as the older sister, could not.

However, this could not be helped due to the problem of the difference in the rate of growth, and she might not understand even if they explained it to her, so Emi lifted Alas=Ramus onto her lap, and as she placated Alas=Ramus. Afterwards, Emi asked Acies, "Then, what do you want to ask Bell?"

"Actually, not just Suzuno, I have things I want to ask Emi too."

"Eh? What is it?"

"I heard that the two of you are going out tomorrow, are you really going?"

"“Eh?””

Emi and Suzuno both let out sounds of confusion

"You said going out, where to?"

"Eh? The two of you aren't going?"

"Like I asked, where is this place we're going to?"

Acies asked in surprise as if she felt shocked about it, and the two parties were unable to match frequencies at all.

"Emi and Suzuno are going to Mother's house, right? That's what I heard."

"“Eh?””

The ‘Eh’ this time was a surprised ‘Eh’.

“Since Emi and Suzuno are both going, then Maou will definitely go as well, right? With this, Ashiya and Lucifer will probably go too?”

“Eh? W,-Wait a moment? Where did you hear that from?”

Emi asked frantically, and Acies replied nonchalantly,

“Just now, Chiho told me ‘We are going to Lailah’s house tomorrow’? So I thought Emi and the rest would go as well.”

If Chiho was present, she would definitely squat down while grabbing her head.

Chiho did ask Acies to keep a secret with regards to Rika, but she did not specifically ask her not to talk about the other things.

And it was normal for Acies to think that Emi and Suzuno were included in the ‘we’ mentioned by Chiho since they had a good relationship. As for Ashiya and Urushihara, who were originally enemies with Emi and the rest, this was outside of Acies’s range of understanding.

However, from Emi’s viewpoint, she had never told Chiho that she would not be going, and had not made any arrangements with Chiho, so having Acies talk about it like this, she would only feel confused.

“W-We’re not going.”

“Eh? Is that so? Suzuno’s not going as well?”

“Y-Yes. I did not plan to go.....”

From Emi and Suzuno’s point of view, they could not understand how Acies had come to this conclusion. Anyway, the two of them did not plan to go to Lailah’s home.

“Eh. Then the ‘we’ mentioned by Chiho, only refers to Maou, Alsiel, and Lucifer?”

“If you’re talking about tomorrow, I did not hear anything about Alsiel and

Lucifer going.”

“Eh? So it’s just Maou, Chiho, and me tomorrow?”

The reason Acies would add herself in was simply because she was unable to stay beyond a certain distance away from Maou.

“I think my father will go too.”

“Father, Maou, Chiho, and I going to Mother’s house..... it feels like we would run out of topics in the middle, causing the atmosphere to become awkward.”

It was unexpected that Acies would be concerned about this kind of thing, but it was true that it was hard to imagine these members having anything to common to chat about.

“.....Anyway, I’m sorry, but we don’t plan to go to Lailah’s house. If you feel that it’s awkward, then can’t you just hide inside the Demon King?”

“That is true. But since it is a rare chance to go out, doing so is rather off putting.”

As Emi’s suggestion caused Acies to pout in unhappiness—

“Acies, are you going out?”

—Alas=Ramus sensitively picked out the term ‘go out’ and reacted.

“Yeah. I’m going to Mother’s house with Maou and Chiho.”

“Papa and Chi nee-chan.....”

““Ugh.””

Alas=Ramus, sitting on Emi’s lap, started to give off a dangerous aura, and Emi and Suzuno showed stony expressions at the same time.

“Mama!”

“W-What is it, Alas=Ra.....”

“I want to go out too!”

Noticing Alas=Ramus’s determined expression, voice, and the hand grabbing her tightly, Emi spoke frantically, “Go, go out? O-oh yes. Then let’s go to the park next to the tracks with Emerada onee-san.....”

“No! I want to be with Papa!”

Emi’s simple and vague suggestion did not work on Alas=Ramus.

“Let me tell you, Papa is going out because of, uh, erhm, an important job? You can’t disturb him.....”

“Then why can Acies go, and I cannot?!”

“T-That’s because, Acies is older now.....”

“No! I’m the older sister!”

“T-That’s true.....”

Perhaps it was the backlash from the snacks just now, Alas=Ramus, in a rare occurrence, stubbornly rebuked Emi’s words.

“We’re not going to work, you know?”

In addition, Acies said this with a dazed look on her face, and it was Suzuno’s turn to panic.

“Acies! Emilia isn’t talking about this right now!”

“Suzuno, telling lies is bad. This is occasionally done when educating children, but you’re making a mistake if you’re thinking that children cannot see through those lies.”

“Why do you only say such sensible things at this kind of moment?!”

“.....Mama, lying?”

“A-A-A-Alas=Ramus, this isn’t a lie. I’m not lying! Papa is really going out for work. But.....”

“Papa, Chi nee-chan, and Mama have the same work! Why isn’t Mama going?!”

Perhaps using the term work was not the most appropriate, Alas=Ramus honed in on this and would not let it go.

At this point, Emi remembered that Alas=Ramus would occasionally become mysteriously smarter during battle, and because she did not know how much she could pull the wool over Alas=Ramus’s eyes, Emi panicked.

“So I said, erhm, it’s a different work from normal.”

“Yeah, it’s not work.”

“Acies! Please be mindful of the atmosphere!”

“Uh, sorry, I am basically on onee-san’s side.”

“I want to go out! Go out with Papa—!”

“Wait, Alas=Ramus, be quiet! It’s already very late now.....”

“Ee——uwahhhhhhhh! I want to go outttttt!”

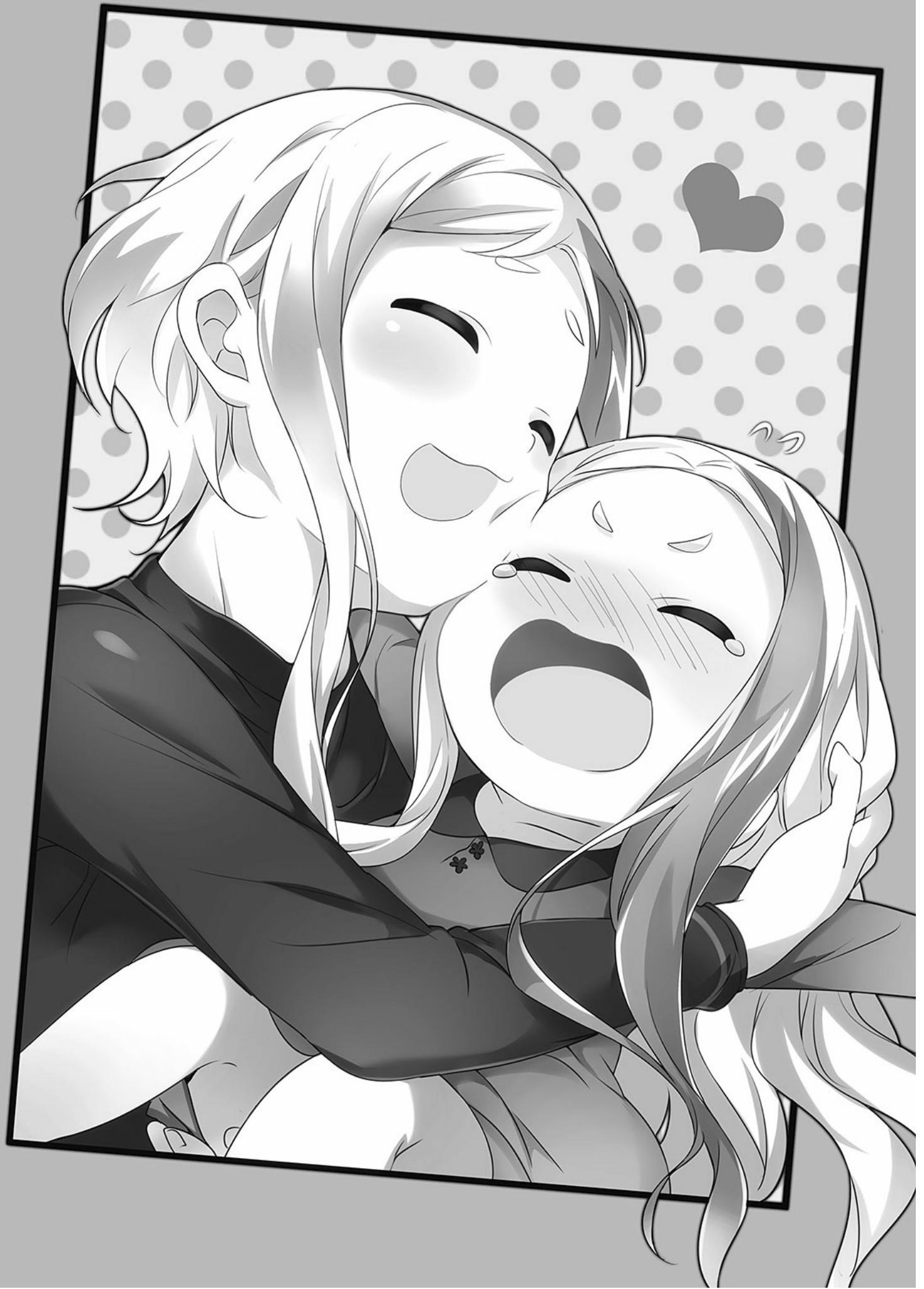
At this point, there was no way to contain the situation.

Alas=Ramus feeling an unprecedented level of anger, started to cry loudly.

“E-Emilia! Think of something quickly! I-I have never encountered such a situation!”

“Me too! P-please, Alas=Ramus, just listen obediently.....”

“I—want—to—go—out—too—!”



"Ah~ really, onee-san is so cute."

Only Acies picked up Alas=Ramus who was crying loudly and rubbed their cheeks together.

"What, did something happen?"

"Hey, it's noisy, what happened?"

"What happened, did Alas=Ramus hurt herself?"

"All of you will just make the situation worse, don't come over!"

"Eeeeeeuahhhhhhhhhhh!"

In addition, perhaps they had heard Alas=Ramus crying, the voices of Maou, Urushihara, and Ashiya could be heard from the public corridor outside. Alas=Ramus suddenly came to her senses, jumped down from Acies's arms and rushed to the porch. Seeing this, Emi and Suzuno could only kneel onto the floor and sigh in despair.

"Pa—pa—! I want to go out tooooooooooo!"

"W-What is it, what happened? Alas=Ramus is actually crying so much, hey, Emi, what did you do?! Suzuno, open the door! Don't worry, Alas=Ramus! Papa is here!"

Alas=Ramus banged on the porch door as she continued crying, causing Maou to truly panic.

"I'm opening the door."

In this chaos, only Acies walked to the porch calmly and unlocked the porch door without getting the consent of the owner. After that, with snot and tears, Alas=Ramus rushed into the arms of Maou who was waiting outside.

"I want to go out tooooo, only Acies going out is too slyyyy!"

"Ah? How was she acting sly?"

Maou, who thought the situation was strange, turned towards Emi and Suzuno for help. However, the two of them who had received a huge shock did not respond at all, deepening Maou's confusion.

"Maou, are you going to Mother's home tomorrow?"

“Eh? Oh, you mean Lailah’s home?”

“Onee-san wants to go as well.”

“Huh? Is, is that way she is crying so much?”

“Uwahhhhhh..... uu..... uu.....”

“Now, now, calm down, calm down..... hey, Emi.”

“.....What is it?”

After a full ten seconds, Emi replied softly without even looking up.

“You don’t plan on going?”

“.....Yeah.”

In the end, other than Suzuno, Emi did not tell anyone that she had rejected Lailah’s invite.

Never in her dreams did she expect that this fact would be exposed in this way.

“Hey, hey.....”

Maou frowned, then looked at Alas=Ramus and Emi in turn.

“Do you think this situation can be solved by saying that you do not want to go?”

“.....Can’t I hand her over to you and Chiho-chan halfway through so I can stay at some place and not meet Lailah?”

“Are you an idiot?”

Maou kicked away Emi’s meaningless struggle.

“Lailah only said that she would meet us at Shinjuku, so no one knows where we will be going afterwards. If the distance exceeds the limit during the journey and causes you and Alas=Ramus to merge together again, how do you plan to explain this?”

“.....Uuuu.”

Refusing to give up, Emi sighed. Honestly, she still did not want to understand more things about Lailah right now.

If she understood Lailah more, Emi's anger towards her mother might weaken gradually, just like how it was with Maou.

Even if she was no longer angry at Lailah, Emi did not think that the two of them could be like normal mother and daughter.

She felt afraid.

Because if she understood Lailah better, she did not know how she was going to interact with Lailah in the future.

In addition, the disparity between Emi and Chiho with regards to their understanding of Maou's thoughts has not been solved yet.

However, Maou calmly cut through the hesitation which had been swirling within Emi's heart.

"If you're not willing to do so no matter what, I won't force you, however Alas=Ramus's request isn't all that unreasonable. If you're unable to convince her and cause your relationship with her to become like you and Lailah, I'm not going to care."

".....Ugh!"

Alas=Ramus rarely felt angry.

She was normally an obedient child and could clearly discern what was considered a bad deed.

So if Alas=Ramus could see that it was because Emi simply did not want to go, it was difficult to say that Alas=Ramus would definitely not develop a sense of distrust towards Emi in the future.

After all, Emi's current attitude of rejection towards Lailah was simply because she did not want to face her own confusions directly, a rejection stemming from her pessimistic feelings.

Lailah was understanding their situation little by little and was making compromises, Emi knew this very well.

Emi was lacking reasons to firmly decide not to go, and although Alas=Ramus did not understand the whole situation, she must have been unwilling to back down because she sensed the hesitation in Emi's heart.

“Looks like we can only give up!”

“.....”

Could Acies have done so intentionally because she knew this?

Emi may have thought this, but there was no way to confirm.

Emi raised her head as if she had given up—

“Mama.....”

“Emi.”

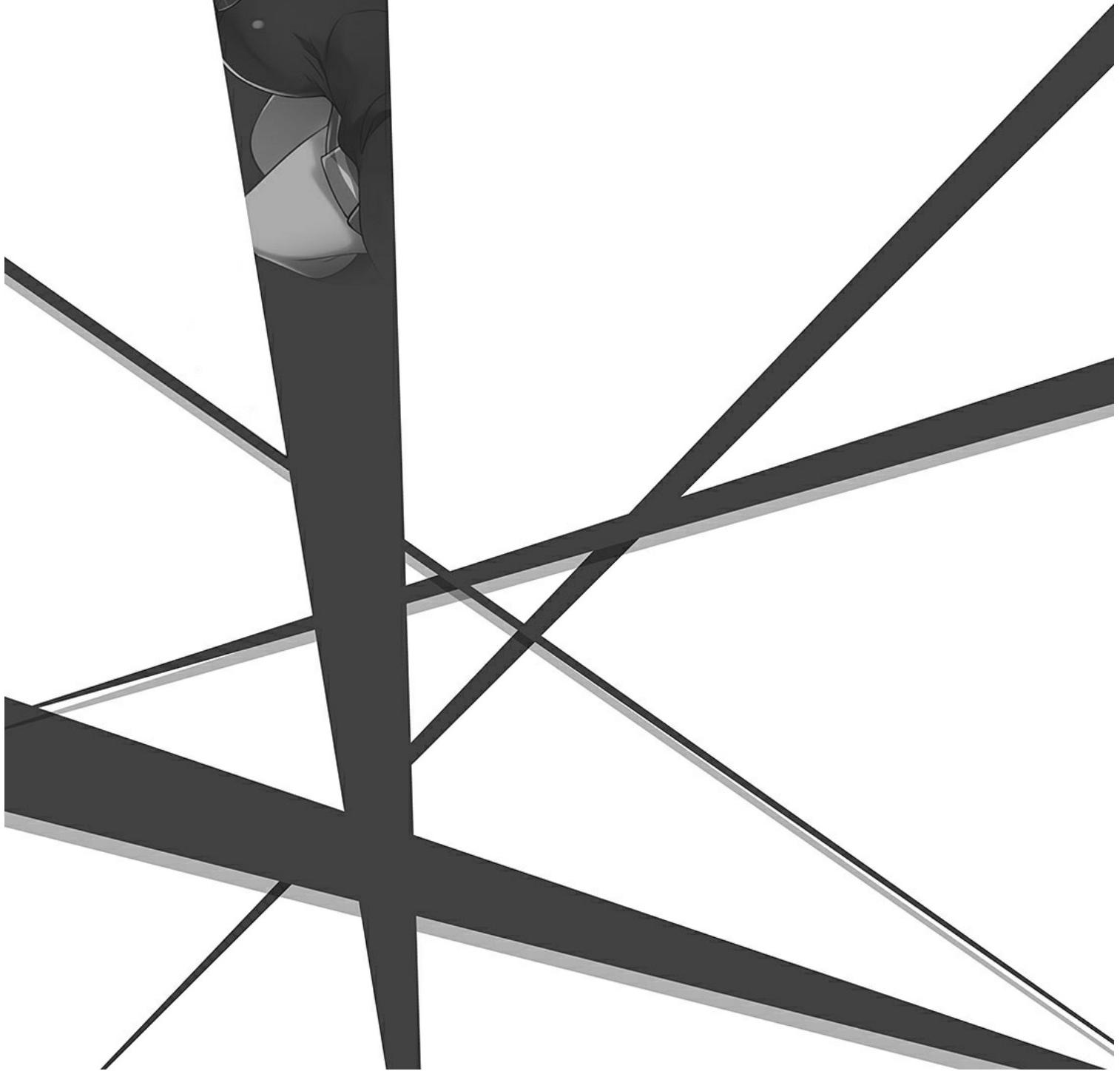
—and looked straight at Alas=Ramus’s face which had swelled up from crying and Maou’s serious expression.

“.....I understand. I’ll go.”

Emi squeezed this out with all her might. She had given up.



**THE
DEMON KING
AND THE HERO,
STARING DIRECTLY
AT THE TRUTH**



Chapter 4: The Demon King and the Hero, Staring Directly at the Truth

The day before, an unknown dramatic incident had occurred in front of the ticketing gate at the Shinjuku station west exit on the Keio Line, but today, a group of people, larger than expected, had gathered here.

“Hey, Acies! Don’t wander off like that! Learn from Iron!”

“Amane, I can’t help doing it even if you tell me this! I detected the smell of curry! How can I not feel excited at that?!”

“The hot spices in curry do not have that effect! Acies, if you aren’t obedient, I’m going to lock you up!”

“And she had eaten so much at the Demon Fortress before heading out..... poor Alsiel was so close to crying.”

“Iron, is your health alright? Were you afraid when riding on the train?”

“Thank you, Nord. Don’t worry. I’m not scared.”

“Rather than that~~ trains should be afraid of him~~.....”

“Emerada-san, shh! Iron is still bothered by that!”

“Oh my~ this station is as crowded as usual! Hey, Emilia! Can you help talk to her for me, that child should be used to me by now, right?”

“I refuse. If you want Alas=Ramus to get used to you, then just disappear.”

“Uuuu..... why is fake white face here too.....”

During evening time, close to the knock off time for the office workers, if a group of this size did not squeeze into the corner, they would disrupt the flow of the crowd.

The number of people who joined the tour group to visit Lailah’s home in

Japan had increased in a short amount of time, other than Maou, Chiho, and Acies, who had joined in the beginning, there were Emi, Alas=Ramus, Suzuno, Nord, Iron, Amane, and Emerada. In the end, even Gabriel had joined in.

“That’s right, Amane-san, why is Gabriel here too?”

Amongst the members of the group, only Gabriel was the odd one out in terms of his position in the situation and his attire.

To Maou and Emi, Gabriel was clearly an enemy, and although the weather was so cold, he still wore a robe and T-shirt as usual.

“Oh my, because Iron said that he wanted to take a train today, based on yesterday’s experience, I might not be able to handle things myself if something unexpected happened.”

“.....Iron, do you want to eat curry? Acies too.”

“Eh! Is that alright, Father?!”

“You’re alright with it?”

“That guy Nord is spoiling them again.”

Once Nord heard Amane talking about the potential dangerous nature of Iron, Nord immediately invited Iron to the instant curry store next to the ticketing gate, and Acies went with them too.

Under normal circumstances, Maou would have stopped them, but because he understood Nord’s painstaking efforts so that Iron would not hear such sensitive topics, he did not stop them in the end.

“That’s right, I came today to help Ama nee-san. Miki-T had briefed me properly beforehand, so don’t worry, I won’t do anything to any of you.”

“What do you mean, Ama nee-san.....”

There was also the huge difference in power to consider, but why Gabriel was acting so familiar with Shiba and obeyed Shiba was a common mystery amongst everyone gathered at Villa Rosa Sasazuka.

“We’re in a safe situation right now, but we still do not know what will trigger Alas=Ramus-chan and Acies-chan into going berserk, so in the worst-case

scenario, I might have to handle three Sephirah on my own. Of course I would want more bodyguards.”

“Sigh, not considering ‘Geburah’, I am already considered very familiar with ‘Yesod’ in some sense, so leave it to me..... by the way, the husband and wife over there are showing scary expressions, so I hope nothing happens at all.”

“Who are you calling husband and wife (huh)?!”

“.....Such rapport.....”

As Maou and Emi threatened Gabriel at the same time, Chiho, Suzuno, and Emerada sighed at the same time as well, as if they felt stunned about it.

However, Gabriel was correct. Emi had witnessed the instance Alas=Ramus lost control because she wanted to search for Acies.

Maou remembered the time Acies went berserk in the Eastern Continent of Ente Isla when they were fighting with Kamael and the others, so he had to agree with what Amane said.

“But then again~~ is it alright for Iron and Acies to eat curry right now~~? We agreed to meet Lailah at 8pm, right~~? There’s only five minutes left.....”

“Don’t worry, Emerada-dono. This is not a problem for Acies,” Suzuno answered Emerada nonchalantly. “See, they have already come out.”

Without being too worried about it, Chiho also pointed in the direction of the store.

“Eh? I-isn’t it too fast~~?”

It was less than three minutes since Nord, Iron and Acies had walked into the store.

“Yeah, this can keep me full for another 30 minutes.”

“Delicious.....”

“Ugpuh.....”

Compared to Acies’s and Iron’s composed expressions, Nord was covering his mouth, his complexion pale.

“You actually honestly ate together with them.”

Emi noticed that behind the trio, the stunned and surprised customers in the store were looking in this direction from the store entrance, and after seeing her father's appearance, she roughly guessed what had happened in the store.

"Father, are you alright?"

There was no need to match Acies's and Iron's eating speed in the first place.

"B-Barely..... b-but, Emilia, I finally knew one of the truths of this country just now."

"Eh?"

Nord glanced sideways at Chiho who was helping Acies and Iron wipe their mouths, and said, "So curry is really for drinking after all."

"....."

It was meaningless even if Nord was told that this was not the meaning of this sentence.

"Is that the 'finish in one gulp' method which was abolished by the world because it was harmful to the health....."

Faced with this sentence said by her father, Emi thought she understood, but she did not quite understand, and at the same time, she did not want to understand.

When it came down to it, from her father's position, when seeing Acies and Iron eating in that manner, he should have been chiding them about it instead.

"I must teach Alas=Ramus to eat properly."

"Only Acies again..... uuuu."

As Emi made this decision, Alas=Ramus, who was in her arms, pouted in unhappiness, and at this moment: "Emilia?"

A loud voice caused everyone present to turn back.

".....Lailah."

Standing there was Lailah, wearing normal jeans and a wool top.

Her eyes widened because she was too shocked, Lailah looked at Emi with

tearful eyes, her hands covering her mouth.

"You're..... willing to come?"

"It's not because I wanted to."

Because Lailah was giving off an aura which felt like she was going to give a hug anytime, Emi readjusted her hold in Alas=Ramus, raised her guard, and increased the distance between them.

"No, it's fine. It doesn't matter. Thank you, for freeing up your time."

"....."

Unable to face Lailah's expression of crying from happiness, Emi quietly turned her face away.

It was just an instant, but Emi did not want to think that it was good that she had come just because she saw Lailah's happy appearance.

Seeing Emi's attitude, Nord covered his mouth and nodded deeply.

"Thank you everyone..... for specially freeing up your time."

Lailah rubbed the corner of her eyes once, and lowered her head to bow to Maou and the others standing behind Emi and Nord.

"There's no need to count me and Gab-kun in. We are only following the orders of Aunt Miki-T, acting as bodyguards just in case."

"Even so, I am still very thankful. Iron is able to go out without worry because of Amane-san's help."

".....That's right."

Iron nodded immediately.

"Actually, all of you had a place where you can live freely....."

Lailah stroked Iron's black hair and lowered her head in loneliness.

"It's just that we had stolen it."

"It's not only Lailah's fault."

Iron said quickly.

"I feel bad about saying this, but it's not suitable to say these things in front of the station."

Gabriel said this to the depressed Lailah in an extremely frivolous tone.

"And other than Iron, Acies=Ara, and that little girl, everyone already roughly knows about the situation, right?"

"I probably..... understand it," Chiho answered in a troubled manner.

Gabriel must have been talking about that file related to the world crisis.

Chiho had read through it once, Maou and Nord, as well as Amane, who has known Lailah since a long time back, should already know this information.

However, Emi and Emerada did not interact with Lailah much, and Suzuno, going along with Emi's wishes, did not interact significantly with Lailah either.

As witnesses to Maou and Lailah's negotiations, Ashiya and Urushihara should have heard of this before, however the premise of this topic was that the 'humans' were in danger, so as demons, they seemed disinterested from the start.

In addition, Chiho was harbouring a worry about Ashiya. Calling it a worry may be too light of a term, but it was a worry which could not be ignored.

Ashiya was hiding enough demonic magic in his body to transform into his demon form in front of Rika, did Maou know about this or not?

Chiho did not think that Ashiya would betray Maou.

But he would not take such action without reason.

Ashiya did not take part in the gathering today.

The reason Chiho had heard was that it was to prevent Urushihara, who did not want to go, from causing trouble. However, no matter how Chiho thought about it, she did not think that Ashiya would feel that 'watching Urushihara' was more important than 'accompanying Maou to initiate further contact with Lailah'.

Chiho was unable to shake off this strange feeling, similar to biting into sinew while eating a burger patty, but if she carelessly found someone to discuss this,

it might harm Rika's pride.

Chiho's uneasiness showed on her face, and perhaps misunderstanding it as feeling suspicion over what Gabriel said, after Lailah smiled in Chiho's direction, she said this to Gabriel, "Gabriel. Don't mention that right now. I have not fulfilled the negotiation terms with Satan."

"Alright alright."

After Lailah chided Gabriel with a stern tone, she turned towards everyone.

"Perhaps everyone had heard this from Amane-san or Shiba-san, when I was in Japan, I had temporarily stayed in Nerima."

"Nerima?"

"So close....."

"I'm not sure if it's considered close or far from Mitaka."

The ones who felt surprised were Maou, Emi, and Nord.

"I help out at Fushima Park frequently."

"Is that so?"

Lailah also widened her eyes in surprise.

The easiest way to go from Shinjuku to Nerima was to take the train on the Toei Ōedo Line in the direction of Hikarigaoka.

The Fushima Park Maou had mentioned was a branch within that theme park, and because Kisaki's colleague and childhood friend, Mizushima Yuki, was the shop manager there, Kisaki would occasionally send people there to help.

"I have not been to Fushima Park, but I stay at an apartment which is located a five minute walk away from Nerima station. That place is also one of Shiba-san's properties, and she did lower the rent for me. When I have work, I will commute from there to Shinjuku."

"Work?" Chiho asked.

"Yeah. I will probably also answer Chiho-san's questions today. Which would be what kind of life I live in Japan."

"I see..... eh, strange?"

Chiho nodded, feeling complex emotions, and after that, she noticed something.

"Lailah-san, you don't look that well?"

"Eh?"

Having Chiho point this out, for unknown reasons, Lailah replied with something resembling that of a scream.

"About that, you seem to have some black eye circles."

Amane continued with what Chiho had said without any trace of politeness.

"Ah, that is, erhm....."

Lailah suddenly shifted her gaze away in a pathetic manner, and her gaze met with Nord's.

"Uh, I did say so before."

"Yeah."

"A-Aren't you surprised?"

"A-About?"

"I have worked hard. I have worked hard..... erhm, because I was too busy before, I put it aside for too long, so one day to settle this was not enough."

Everyone present could not understand what Lailah was trying to say.

"A-Anyway, erhm, let's move first! We'll just have to take the Ōedo Line!"

Lailah, whose complexion worsened, intentionally shouted loudly, then started to walk at the front to guide everyone.

".....What was that about?"

"I don't know....."

Maou and Nord were confused about Lailah who had been acting strangely agitated, but either way, everyone started walking, following Lailah.

The group of people who had passed through the Keio shopping area and

walked through the ticketing gate of the Ōedo Line arrived underground, just in time to see the train heading in the direction of Hikarigaoka arrive.

The Ōedo Line was different from the other metro lines, not only were their train carriages smaller, their shape was a little more unique.

After realising this, not just Acies and Alas=Ramus, even Suzuno and Emerada made a rare show of looking around them agitatedly to survey their surroundings, causing Maou to feel irritated.

Lailah, sitting next to Nord, would occasionally look in Emi's direction, and every time their gazes meet accidentally, Emi would frantically shift her gaze away, causing Emi to repeatedly look towards Chiho unnaturally. For Maou, used to taking the Ōedo Line and not treating it as anything special, he felt very awkward.

A short time later, the train arrived at Nerima station, and when they got to ground level, the group followed Lailah once again, walking on the streets of Nerima.

Turning right after exiting from the ticketing gate, they immediately reached a main road parallel to the tracks.

Looking at the Nerima Civil Office on the right side and after walking in the residential area for five minutes— “.....This is the apartment I stay in. I stay on the third floor.”

—Lailah stopped walking in front of an ordinary looking ten floor apartment.

This building with a cream coloured exterior wall looked just like a normal apartment suite.

“Up to now, there’s nothing to be surprised about,” Nord said, feeling rather confused.

“Compared with the apartment Demon King Satan lives in, there’s nothing special even if angels lived in this apartment.

“Even so, the rent here does not appear to be as expensive as the apartment Sariel-sama lives in.”

It seemed like Suzuno’s thoughts were similar.

“I should be feeling surprised.....”

Chiho, the only normal human amongst this group, said this with a rather wry smile.

To Chiho, who had witnessed the very realistic lifestyles of the Demon King and the angels over a long period of time, even if the gods were her neighbours, she would not feel surprised.

“This place feels boring.”

And at the very very end, Aries mercilessly made her judgement.

“T-This living environment is rather good! Because it’s behind the main road, there is no need to worry about the noisy cars. It’s also very close to shopping places and the area office, even from the bus stop.....”

“This isn’t important. Before I see what’s inside, I’m not going to believe you.”

Maou rushed Lailah irritatedly.

“Ah, yeah.....”

However, after arriving here, Lailah suddenly showed a hesitant attitude.

“.....Hey, is it really this place?”

“I-I really stay here. Right, Amane-san!”

Lailah pleaded with Amane-san for help.

“That’s right. It’s the same as what I heard, Maou-kun, look over there.”

“Hmm?”

Once Maou looked in the direction Amane had gestured with her chin, he noticed a metal plate which seemed to have the apartment name written on it.

“Royal Lily Toyotama Park.....”

For such a simple looking apartment to have such a name, it did resemble Shiba’s style.

“I just need, some mental preparation. Fu..... anyway, please enter everyone. The elevator is very wide, so it should be enough for everyone.”

Making up her mind, Lailah walked towards the main hall.

“.....Hey, Chi-chan.”

“Y,-Yes.”

Maou walked at the back of the group, and spoke to Chiho softly.

Suddenly being called out by Maou softly caused Chiho to straighten her back.

“I’m sorry to trouble you, but can I ask you to help look around closely?”

“L,-Look around closely, do you mean Lailah-san’s room?”

Chiho lowered her volume on reflex.

“Yeah. Carefully observe if Lailah really lives here, are there any signs of being lived in or things like that.”

“Signs of being lived in?”

“For a woman living alone, are there any areas which are strange.”

Maou mumbled with a frown.

“I don’t know what the house of a woman who lives alone looks like, I might not be able to tell even if she staged an appearance. If you see something unnatural or strange from the point of view of a female, no matter how insignificant it is, I hope you can tell me.”

“I-I’m not that confident about that..... ah.”

Just as they entered the main hall while speaking, the elevator arrived.

“Ah, s-sorry, please take the next elevator.....”

The elevator filled quickly, and only Maou and Chiho were left outside.

Thinking about it carefully, including Lailah, there were twelve plus one people in total.

For an elevator in an apartment building, this should be considered a number which would barely fit inside.

If it was a large apartment building, there might be another larger elevator for house movers to use, but there seemed to be only one elevator here.

“It’s okay. It’s the third floor, right? We’ll take the stairs.”

“Excuse us. Then we’ll see you upstairs.”

After Maou said this, Gabriel, who was standing at the front, pressed the door close button and the elevator door closed mercilessly.

Hearing the motor sounds of the elevator going up—

“.....Sorry for always troubling you.”

Maou mumbled as he watched the elevator doors closed.

“I know I’m too dependent on Chi-chan.”

“Eh.....”

Maou’s unexpected sentence caused Chiho to suck in a breath.

“Using the fact that Chi-chan accepts me, I include you in my plans, and every single time in various situations just like this, Chi-chan will be the one to lose out. I’m really sorry.”

By going along with Maou’s plans, Chiho ended up having to climb the stairs.

“That’s..... it’s alright, because I did so voluntarily.....”

“Even so, I should not ignore the feelings you have deep inside you and continue using you like this. Ashiya also scolded me severely yesterday.”

“Eh?”

Hearing Ashiya’s name in an unexpected place, Chiho got another shock.

What time did that happen yesterday?

Why did Ashiya tell Maou such things?

However, Maou did not answer Chiho’s questions and said with a troubled smile, “When was the last time that guy got this angry? A lot of things happened the day before as well, even Urushihara read the atmosphere for once and did not interrupt, it was as if I was sitting on pins and needles.”

Chiho did not know what ‘a lot of things happened the day before’ and ‘this angry’ meant.

However, since Maou had said so, it was not difficult to imagine that it was clearly different from Ashiya’s displays of anger which Chiho had seen many

times before.

"It's just that..... Chi-chan is always so kind to me, so before I knew it..... I'm really sorry this time as well."

It was unclear if he was still confused, choosing his words carefully, or had not sorted out his own feelings, Maou said this while stuttering.

"This is bad. I'm saying this so messily."

Maou scratched his head awkwardly.

"Erhm, if this is becoming a burden, you should say so earlier....."

"Recently, I have been wondering if Maou-san has forgotten."

Once Chiho heard the term burden, she spoke on reflex.

"I said so a long time ago, right? I like Maou-san."

"Eh?"

Chiho's direct answer caused Maou to scream.

"I don't think that it is a burden at all, being trusted by Maou-san makes me feel happy, it's completely fine even if Maou-san is dependent on me."

Chiho pouted a little and glared at Maou.

"I'm a girl after all, so even if it is just a little, I want to know why you trust and depend on me. If possible, I want Maou-san to say so personally."

"Uh, erhm....."

Chiho noticed that what she had said on reflex unexpectedly contained the answer which would unravel the troubles in her heart.

"I do not doubt Maou-san's trust, and I do not feel that it is a burden. However, I actually do not know why Maou-san trusts me so much."

She was not strong like Emi or Suzuno, she was not like Ashiya or Urushihara who had known Maou for a very long time, and she was not like Lailah who had saved his life before.

She was just a junior at his workplace, why was Maou able to trust her this much?

Of course, the trust in human relationships was something accumulated from many small things which happened normally or based on a vague impression, but because it was like that, after evaluating her own position objectively, Chiho had no choice but to admit that what she had done did not deserve the special level of trust Maou had in her.

She did not know how to fight and was unable to support his daily living, even her species, hometown, and circumstances were completely different, why did Maou trust someone like her?

“You will, tell me one day, right?”

If this question had an answer, this might be almost equivalent to Maou’s clear answer to Chiho’s feelings.

At least, there was no urgency to push for this answer when everyone was waiting upstairs.

“.....Honestly, I am still.....”

“It’s fine if you don’t know. But after you know, you have to tell me first, okay?”

“.....I understand, it’s a promise.”

If Kaori was present, she would definitely chide Chiho for being too naïve by allowing Maou to continue delaying it.

However, this was Chiho’s limit.

During the negotiation with Lailah after this, just making a decision may cause Maou to end up in an important situation related to life and death, so asking him to analyse human relationships at a time like this would only pile more pressure on him.

Chiho did not wish to become Maou’s source of stress.

“Let’s go. Lailah-san and the others are still waiting upstairs.”

“.....Yeah.”

Under Chiho’s prompting, Maou slowly walked towards the staircase next to the main hall.

Maou's hesitant movements caused Chiho to feel a sorrow she could not pull herself out from as well as a sense of happiness from knowing that Maou was seriously thinking about her issues. She could not help but grab Maou's hand from behind, then running ahead to pull him along.

"Chi-chan?"

"If you don't move quicker, Yusa-san and the rest will get angry."

Quickly running up the public staircase where her footsteps echoed, Chiho confirmed the touch of Maou's hand against hers.

After winter started, the air started to become dry, busy with work everyday, Maou's hand felt cold and a little dry.

This slightly rough feeling caused Chiho to remember the first time she held Maou's hand.

At that time, Chiho's feelings of love which had bloomed from her feelings of admiration had just started to solidify. During that period of time, holding that hand required the largest amount of courage she had ever needed in her life so far.

"Can I..... hold..... your hand?"

"Like this? Sure."

The instant her own hand felt the new temperature, it felt as if her heart was going to jump out of her mouth.

Because she was too surprised and happy, Chiho did not really remember what Maou's hand felt like at that time.

However, Chiho believed that the warm grip which Maou returned on reflex when she held his hand was the same as that time.

She accumulated many of such convictions in her heart.

"This may give you some pressure!"

"Eh?"

"But as long as I am together with Maou-san, instead of the elevator, I would rather slowly climb up the stairs!"

“W-What is that supposed to mean?”

“Exactly what it means on the surface.”

With his feelings in chaos, Maou probably did not notice Chiho's true intentions implied in her words.

However, it was enough like this.

Chiho felt that the darkness which had sunken into her heart in the past few days had finally started to dissipate.

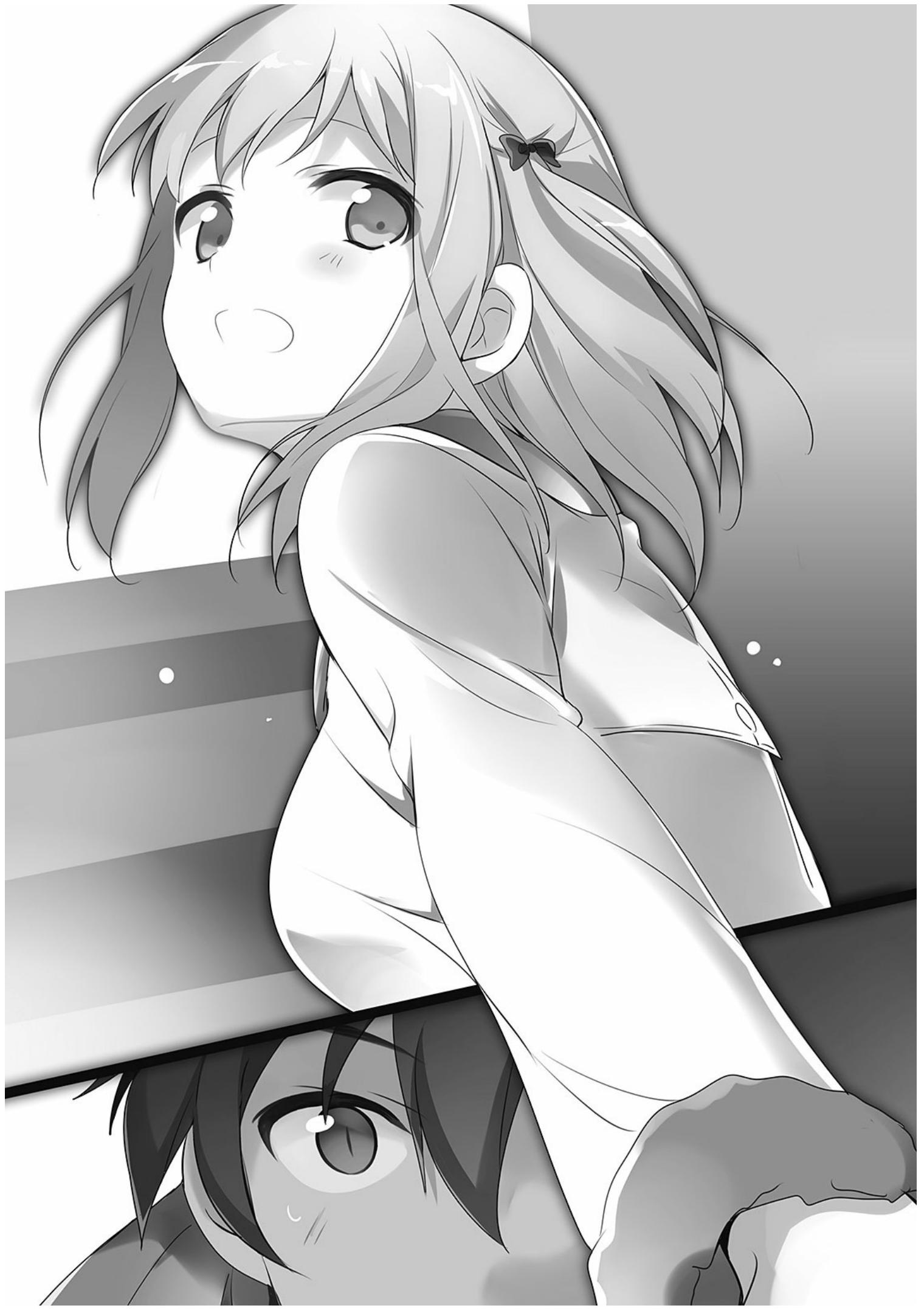
“Were the stairs difficult to find?”

Lailah was waiting worriedly on the third floor.

“We just stayed in the main hall for a while. Sorry for making everyone wait.”

Chiho replied before Maou could and bowed her head in apology.

Lailah did not seem to doubt this explanation.



"I should be the one feeling bad for making both of you use the stairs. Then, I live in Room 306."

She changed the topic and pointed at a room in the corner of the corridor.

"I have told everyone this before..... but, erhm, don't be too surprised."

This time, Lailah's annoying reminder finally caused Chiho to feel uneasy as well.

Chiho wanted to follow Maou's request and observe carefully, but she could not help but think strange thoughts; like the room was connected to a subspace or that she would end up flying to a foreign world once the door was opened.

Lailah took out a key from her jacket pocket and stuck it into the keyhole, and after sighing hard, she turned towards Nord and Emi.

"I'm going to bring both of you bitter..... or more like awkward memories again."

““Huh?””

“I’m really sorry! This is my home in Japan!”

Lailah unlocked the door as if she had finally given up and pushed the door open.

“T,-This is.....?”

Then, the first person to exclaim, was Lailah's husband, Nord.

※

“This is really too bad..... how can people not feel surprised from this?”

“Amazing..... this is no longer a problem where there are no signs of being lived in.”

Maou and Chiho chatted, still feeling surprised.

“Even Lucifer isn’t this bad.”

“I don’t have the right to comment on the living attitude of other people~~ but this is.....”

Suzuno and Emerada also felt very troubled about this.

"Yusa-san had a family conflict some time back, but it's amazing Nord hasn't mentioned anything about divorce yet."

"I heard that the differences in living attitudes was ranked as the most common reason for divorces."

Amane and Gabriel were acting like this had nothing to do with them.

"Yummy!"

"Delicious."

Acies and Iron did not have any special thoughts though they saw this scene, and were as usual showing their normal appetite after ordering a scary amount of food at the Moz Burger at Nerima station, causing Maou and Amane a lot of trouble.

"Maou! The fries here are thicker than MgRonalds!"

".....Yeah."

"But the burgers are more inconvenient to eat. They keep dropping."

These children of Sephirah who did anything they wanted at their own pace caused Maou to feel dizzy once he thought about Alas=Ramus's future.

"So? Can the Demon King accept Lailah now?"

"Who would be able to accept such a thing?"

After being asked this by Gabriel who was drinking a West India Peach Soda drink, Maou shook his head, his complexion pale.

He did want to know how Lailah was living her life in Japan, but Maou had never expected that it would be like this.

Even the topic of divorce which Amane and Gabriel had mentioned did not feel like it was meant to be a joke.

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"What..... what is this....."

The first one to speak was Emi.

"Actually being this....."

Nord also groaned afterwards.

“.....I’m sorry, I tried hard, but there was too little time.”

Lailah opened the porch door and hung her head in guilt.

“Mama, the room is dark.”

“Seriously.....”

“Uwah.....”

“T-This is.....”

“Ohh~~”

“.....It seems cramped.”

“C-Can we still go in?”

“This is bad.”

The group expressed their opinions in a tone of either shock or awe, and finally, Acies ended with— “This is simply a mess.”

—concluding everyone’s opinion.

This could not be called a room anymore.

This should have originally been an apartment suite of around 8 tatami mats in size with a kitchen and a bathroom, but looking in from the porch, it was difficult to see which was the kitchen area and which was the rest of the room.

Amongst the items which were flooding the room, 40% of them were books, 20% were clothes, 10% were cardboard boxes, and the remaining were all piled up together and could only be described as odds and ends.

They were not kept, but simply piled up.

The closet, which was originally used to store clothes and futons, was wide open, and a long hanging pole extended from there all the way to the other end of the room. Like a thick curtain, the various clothes hanging on it obstructed the sunlight streaming into the room.

There were no bookshelves in the room. The books, which were not stacked up by size, extended from the wall to the middle of the room in a slanted pile,

looking just like a mortar and pestle set.

There was something which looked like a bird nest shaped cloth in the middle of the mortar and pestle, forcefully occupying the place.

At the area which was deduced to be the boundary between the kitchen and the rest of the room, a long computer table similar to the one frequently used by Urushihara was placed there, and on the table was a computer screen which looked dated even from Emi's point of view.

"I had tried..... to clean it up....."

"“Eh?””

Her husband and daughter both showed blank expressions.

"Erhm, those few days I did not go to the Sasazuka apartment, I was very busy with work....."

"Work..... talking about this, what is your job....."

"Yeah, actually."

Lailah turned towards Chiho, acting like she found this difficult to say.

"Eh?"

"Actually, I am a nurse practitioner. And I did pass the national examinations. It is not a permanent job, and only a part time one, but recently I have been at Saikai University Medical College Affiliated Hospital Tokyo Branch....."

Everyone present fell silent momentarily—

"““Ehhhhhhhhhhh?”””

—then Emi, Chiho, Suzuno and Maou shouted at the same time.

"Is, isn't that the hospital which Chiho-chan and Lucifer were sent to?"

"N-Nurse practitioner, Lailah-san has a nurse practitioner license?"

"Appearing at that hospital wasn't a coincidence after all?"

Emi, Chiho, and Suzuno were very flustered, and even Maou found it difficult to conceal his surprise.

"Hey, Nord, did you know about this?"

"N-No, I only heard that she was doing some medical related job, and did not know the exact location..... then again, it's not that easy to obtain a nurse practitioner's license, right?"

"Yeah. I don't know the details, but it should not be something which can be obtained in one year."

Lailah's life, which contained so many surprising facts, caused everyone to feel shaken.

"Ah, erhm, I'm not lying, okay? Only for the nurse practitioner's qualification license, I had specially framed it and hung it up because I was afraid of covering it. Um, erhm, because people who are not used to walking in this might fall over, I'll bring it over and show it to everyone."

A room where people might fall down because they were unused to walking in it, what kind of room was it? Could it be that there were some traps installed within which would make a person trip?

Anyway, Lailah took off her shoes and entered the room.

"Ah, ow! Ah, I-I seemed to have gotten caught onto something....."

After producing a few sounds of struggling hard against something, Lailah brought a thin frame back.

"L-Look!"

Inside, the name of a specialised nursing school, a graduation certificate dated more than ten years ago, as well as a certificate for passing the examination was listed.

As for the name written on top—

"Lailah Justina..... you actually used this name directly?"

Seeing the last name Justina being used so boldly on it, Emi asked this in shock.

"Yes. I am a naturalised foreigner. At the beginning, I got into the specialised school using an exchange student visa and submitted my request for naturalisation five years later. Thanks to the help of Shiba-san's relatives, my origins were set as a British person."

However, using her actual name so obviously, would this not cause trouble if she was trying to get away from her pursuers from Heaven?

"It's not like I have never considered using a Japanese name. However, once I thought about how naturalisation would mean that this name would be acknowledged as a 'human' living in a certain country in this world, I wanted to use my actual name regardless of the consequences. I hoped that there would be a world with humans who would accept this name and acknowledge that I am human."

Lailah seemed to harbour a strong conviction, and did not change her name because of this.

By the way, only Emi, Suzuno, and Emerada knew this, but everyone else was thrown a flash bomb without knowing anything about it.

Because Lailah only wanted to use her name, whose last name was Nord's, for registration into Japan's household records.

"With this, all of you can understand that I also have a clear footprint in this country, right?"

Emi felt troubled about how she should answer Lailah's question.

Using a method more concrete than what Emi had expected, Lailah had been living in Japan honestly, with both her feet on solid ground.

However, from the state of the room, it felt like Lailah had sunk into a swamp as well.

"Ah, er-erhm, because I will be going to work during this period of time, if you need proof of me working at the hospital, as long as everyone is willing to go to the hospital on that day, I will find a way to accommodate my schedule!"

Perhaps she interpreted Emi's troubled feelings as suspicion, Lailah added this hastily.

"Hey, if you still feel uneasy, I can go get the Resident Card right now, the receipts for the electricity and gas bills should be somewhere in this room as well, and, erhm....."

Lailah started to focus all her efforts on Emi, trying hard to have Emi

understand her own life even more.

“.....Father, what are your thoughts?”

“Eh? Y-Yeah.”

So that Lailah would remember that other people were present, Emi first threw the topic to Nord.

After that, Nord nervously touched the beard on his chin and asked jitterly, “L-Lailah.”

“Y-Yes.....”

“Based on what I remember..... your living habits shouldn’t be this bad.”

“S-Sorry! Erm, because I was busy with many issues related to the hospital and Ente Isla, so I practically only used this place to sleep!”

This sentence which could mean feelings of disappointment or dumbfoundedness from her beloved husband caused Lailah to apologise repeatedly.

“Can I say something~~~”

At this moment, an unexpected person spoke.

“I think~~ Lailah really lives here~~”

“Em?”

Emerada raised her hand nervously.

Discovering that someone was stretching out a helping hand from an unexpectedly place, Lailah’s expression lit up instantly.

“Because the hostel room at the Sorcery Management Institute which I had lent to Lailah to stay for a while~~ also became like this after she left~~”

However, that helping hand brought over a pile of explosives and ignited it in front of everyone, causing Lailah’s smile to freeze momentarily.

“T-That is because..... sorry, causing trouble for you before.....”

Lailah’s attitude in her honest apology was worthy of respect, but because she did not dare to see the expression on her daughter’s face as her daughter

stared at her, for a long while, Lailah did not raise her head.

“After receiving the care from Shiba-san and slowly building up the foundation for living here..... during this time, after living in this country I have never seen before where its citizens are full of life, I accidentally became complacent..... I am reflecting on this.”

“Although this is an era where there is a continuous economic slump and everything is going down.”

Maou rebuked calmly. Lailah, while sweating cold sweat, shook her head with a stern expression.

“I have seen countries where many children who lost their parents end up begging on the streets, then end their short life just like this. The economy is bad, but there are still many people who are working hard to make tomorrow better than today, it is a country which is filled with liveliness. As long as everyone is looking in a positive direction, the world will turn towards the positive direction. This is a very happy thing.”

“Even so, you can’t be so lively until the room ends up like this.”

“Uu.”

Her daughter rebuked sharply from an area outside her field of view, causing Lailah to become speechless.

“Lucifer is like that as well, the angels are basically a group of people who are undisciplined in their living habits. I am starting to be a little concerned about Sariel’s and Gabriel’s living habits.”

“.....I really have nothing to say.”

Lailah’s tone became more and more defeated.

“There’s really nothing to say.”

For unknown reasons, Gabriel added this on.

“Sigh.....”

Emi’s sigh was heard from outside her field of view, making Lailah flinch.

However—

“.....Yusa-san?”

Chiho noticed that the expression on Emi's face was unexpectedly calm.

“Do you think that you will be able to get back your deposit after you move out if you're using the room in such a messy manner? Are you looking down on the life of living in an apartment?”

“As long as the walls aren't dirty or damaged too badly, Aunt Miki-T would probably allow it.”

“Amane-san, that's not the issue. Since you're renting someone else's apartment, the basic levels of cleanliness must be maintained when using it.”

“Ah~ but it seems like a certain Demon King-sama came to my place to work because the room he rented had a huge hole opened up in it?”

“Amane-san, that guy is the one at fault.”

“Hey! It's not me! It's your child who did that! It feels like you had pushed the blame onto me like this before?”

Gabriel, who was unexpectedly implicated, explained himself in a flustered manner.

“Anyway, whether it is the Hero or the Demon King, they need to do housework when they get home. I don't know what you were thinking when you were taking action in the shadows, but I don't want to listen to a person who cannot even organise their own life.”

“T-That is.....”

Lailah showed an expression of regret, but after seeing this disaster, anyone would feel that Emi's words were reasonable and there was no way to defend Lailah.

“.....Hey, Emerada. What should we do? That Emi found another excuse to not hear Lailah out.”

“.....I am starting to hope that she can just give in~~”

Even so, unable to decide what kind of attitude she should use when interacting with Lailah, Emi started to become hesitant, like she had become an

entirely different person. This did cause the people around her to feel mildly irritated.

Especially for Emerada who was staying at Emi's home when she was in Japan, she must have seen this side of Emi more than anyone else.

Just as everyone was starting to give up and wait for Emi to leave, citing the disastrous state of the room as the reason for doing so— “So I do not plan to hear you out today..... but at least allow me to clean up this room.”

—Emi raised a surprising suggestion, causing colour to return to Lailah's pale face.

“.....Emilia.”

Not considering the cleaning up, Emi had actually said that she wanted to enter Lailah's room.

“R-Really?”

Emi looked away to avoid Lailah's stare and spoke in a slightly faster pace.

“I just don't want my friends to think that my mother is such a slob!”

“Emilia..... t-thank you..... thank you!”

Emi had only indirectly addressed Lailah as her mother, but it was enough to make Lailah tear up.

“Let me say this first, you still owe Em a favour. Taking advantage of your daughter's friend, you're really too shameless.”

“A-Alright.....”

“The most unforgivable thing is that although you live this near, you threw all the work of taking care of Acies to Father, and also throwing Alas=Ramus to Villa Rosa Sasazuka without saying anything, you better not say that you have nothing to do with that. Do you know how chaotic it was for us at the beginning?”

“Yeah..... sorry.”

“However.....”

At this point, Emi softened her tone for the first time.

"This disastrous scene totally exceeded my expectations, but this is the first time I've felt that you're 'living' in front of me. This is the only thing I learned from today."

"Yusa-san....."

"Emilia....."

"How indirect~~"

After Chiho, Suzuno, and Emerada had seen that Emi still showed small signs of wanting to get close to Lailah despite thinking up a bunch of excuses, they breathed a sigh of relief.

"Yusa-san, let me help as well....."

Chiho suggested, but Emi rejected her politely.

"Thank you. But after seeing this mess, having too many people will only cause us to get in each other's way. Family should clean up after the trouble made by their own. Everyone..... for what happened during this period of time, I'm really sorry."

Emi's short apology contained her intentions to apologise for her weak self during this period of a little more than a month.

"Demon King, how about you? Do you have anything else to say?"

Finally, Emi turned to Maou, who had wanted to know about Lailah's life more than her, for confirmation.

".....Since you have nothing against this, I have nothing more to say. Whatever you do afterwards is up to you. I won't change my thoughts just because I saw this."

"Is that so? Sorry about that."

Emi raised her hand slightly in apology.

".....Hey, it's time to go."

"Eh? We're going already? What did we come here for?"

It was not strange for Acies to ask this, but it seemed like the original intentions of Maou and the others were just to confirm Lailah's living

environment.

The reason they brought Acies and Iron along was simply for their guardians' convenience.

"Huh? What is this? This is such a waste of effort!"

It was not known what kind of effort Acies had wasted, but she seemed to be dissatisfied to leave just like this.

"Sigh..... then let's just find some place to eat."

"Now you just said what I wanted to hear!"

Only food could be used to placate Acies when she refused to give in, after all.

"You just ate curry, please carry yourself with more dignity."

Maou felt a dangerous aura from the excited Acies.

"Then, Nord, we're going back."

"Eh?"

When Maou announced that he was returning, Nord made a rare show of freezing on the spot.

Behind Nord, Emi had quickly commenced with the demolition process of Lailah's home.

"Then! Let's throw away all these extra things which look like they are not being used!"

"Wait, Emilia! That is the pig patterned dress I had bought during my first shopping trip in this country, I like it a lot....."

"Nonsense! Since it is something important, then wash and fold it properly! The Demon King's apartment is so clean, don't you feel embarrassed about this?"

A fierce cleaning up battle was happening between mother and daughter.

"M-Must I stay?"

"Of course. They are your wife and daughter, right?"

"Uh, erhm, that is true....."

“Take care of your wife and the young lady~~”

“Erm, Emerada-san, that.....”

“Father! Please go to the pharmacy we passed by on the way here to buy masks! If we breathe in this kind of place, we might get asthma!”

“Hey, Yusa-chan is calling for you.”

“P-Please do your best.....”

“We’ll just allow this family to bond after this.”

“Help me tell Lailah that I’ll take care of the rest.”

“Alright! Let’s go eat!”

“Where should we go to eat.....”

“Ah, e-everyone, please wait.....”

“Father! Get rubbish bags, raffia string, and tongs as well!”

“Emilia, please wait a moment! I will go wash it properly! And those are textbooks! I still use them occasionally, please don’t throw them away!”

Stunned, Nord watched Maou and the others as they prepared to go home.

“Dear! Help me!”

“Father! You can’t spoil her!”

Behind him the shouts of mother and daughter with opposing views were heard.

“.....Grandpa.”

Because he felt someone pulling at his pants, Nord looked down.

“Both mamas are scary.”

“Y-Yeah.”

It may have been his imagination, but Nord felt that Alas=Ramus was asking for help with a tense expression on her face, so he had to pick her up— “I-I need to gather myself together.....”

And in a sad manner, made up his mind.

※

“I wonder if Yusa-san will make up with Lailah-san.”

With an empty gaze, Chiho looked out of the window subconsciously.

“It’s hard to say. The distance between them may have shortened, but it’s not known if it will continue to improve until they reconcile.”

“But~~ as long as the distance has shortened~~ it will be easier to find an opportunity~~”

Compared to Maou, Emerada’s expression did not look optimistic, but it was not to the point of being pessimistic.

“Then again, how did she plan to make angel feather pens inside that room?”

“Eh? Angel feather pens~~ what about them?”

Hearing what Maou said and feeling surprised, Emerada took out the angel feather pen, which was just mentioned, from the handbag she had bought in Japan.

“Wow! This is my first time seeing the actual thing! So pretty!”

Seeing the slightly glowing feather pen, Chiho shouted out in surprise.

The angel feather pen Emerada had was entrusted to her by Lailah earlier so Alberto and her would be able to go to Japan to find Emi.

“Lailah said that as long as she wished to do so, she would be able to make angel feather pens for each of us in that room. I’m not sure if she meant for that to be a reward or planned to use that to ask us to do something for her.”

“.....In that room huh~~”

Emerada frowned.

“I don’t know how she is going to make it~~ but it feels like dust will get on it~~”

“That’s right. And I only know that making those feather pens require an archangel’s feather, not the actual method of making them. Hey, Gabriel. Is it like the white crane in the folk tales where they pluck out their own feathers to make it?”

Being asked this by Maou, Gabriel replied with his usual frivolous smile, "If I said yes?"

"I would feel a little repulsed."

They may be called angels, but their appearance resembles that of a human.

Many wigs would use real hair as materials, but as long as it had gone through the proper processing, the finished product would exhibit similar properties to the original material such that the people would not feel repulsed while using them.

On the other hand, when thinking that the feather pens of the angels were made from the angels pulling out their feathers one by one, the holy atmosphere surrounding these items would dispel immediately.

"Sigh, it would be useless even if you knew, but don't worry, we don't really pull out our feathers, but use a secret technique."

Gabriel gave an answer which did not really sound like an answer, but the instant Chiho and Emerada heard this, they thought of something at the same time.

"Eh~~ but I remember~~"

"Y-Yeah. I heard the same thing at that time too."

The two of them could not help but look towards Maou's face.

"The Demon King did say so before~~"

"Demons are unable to use the angel feather pen, right?"

"Yeah, I did say something like that."

Maou nodded.

Only people who have holy magic would be able to use the angel feather pen. Demons, who do not have any holy magic, are of course unable to use it. This was something Maou had heard from Lailah directly when he was young.

If so, when Lailah said that she was able to make angel feather pens for everyone, why did Maou react that way?

"I don't know how that angel feather pen works..... but since demons are

unable to use it, then Lucifer is the same as well?" Suzuno asked from the side.

"Half and half I guess. Even if it can be used successfully, we would not know how stable it is until it is actually used."

"T-Then why did Maou-san....."

"One of the reasons is that there might be other uses for it. Another reason is that the angels are definitely our enemies right now, so we might get some important information about the enemy through this."

"Oh~~ so that is why~~"

"Other uses, huh. Feels like it would be difficult."

Emerada expressed her agreement and Chiho started to think about any other possible 'uses'.

"....."

Only Suzuno stared at Maou in surprise.

"Sigh, anyway, just like what Emerada said, I don't want to use any of the angel feather pens which were made in that room, and currently, we don't even know if Lailah is really going to make them or not. Then again, is it really okay for a person with a medical related job to be like that in private?"

It was not known if Maou noticed Suzuno's stare, he shrugged naturally and changed the topic.

"However, I did not expect that Lailah-san would be a nurse practitioner..... perhaps I had been under her care when I was hospitalised and just did not know it."

"This can be confirmed, right? When Chi-chan was sleeping in hospital, she was the one who took the opportunity to secretly put the ring on you."

"That's true."

Chiho remembered that ring with a small fragment of 'Yesod' embedded in it, which was still placed in an accessory box today.

"Sigh, there's nothing surprising about her being a nurse practitioner, Lailah was a doctor a long time ago, medical related courses shouldn't be a problem to

her.”

“Huh?”

“Eh?”

Gabriel suddenly interrupted with a sentence, stunning Maou and the others.

“Lailah is a doctor?”

“Yeah.”

“Jobs actually exist in Heaven?”

“Rather than saying there is, it’s more like there used to be jobs..... but let me say this, all of you had better not think that everyone in Heaven has a first rate philosophy like Lucifer. Most people do not have jobs, and I do not dare to say that I am as hardworking as the working class people in Japan, but I at least have the job of being the guardian angel for the ‘Yesod’.”

After that Gabriel added “Although I was fired a long time ago” in a self-mocking manner.

“But Lailah was really a doctor in the past huh..... oh yeah.”

With the same frivolous expression, Gabriel looked out of the window at the commuters walking in and out of the ticketing gate on the Seibu Ikebukuro Line and said, “That was before we became angels.”

“Before you became angels?”

Suzuno and Emerada frowned and looked at each other, Maou also pursed his lips unhappily.

“Oh~ so it was like that after all.”

Only Amane expressed understanding at what Gabriel said.

“Gab-kun’s companion working at Sentucky were unwilling to say anything, but when did all of you ‘become angels’?”

“Ama nee-san, do you know Sariel? By the way, to put it in Japanese terms, he used to work as something like a lawyer.”

“Doesn’t the term occupational aptitude exist in Heaven?”

Gabriel smiled and ignored Maou's joke.

"Sigh..... anyway, because the way we keep track of years, months and days are slightly different, I am also not too sure about the correct time..... but it should be about ten thousand years since we have become angels."

Ten thousand years.

To humans who even have trouble living up to a hundred years, it was a year number which could not be imagined, perhaps even feared.

"Gabriel-san."

"Hm? What is it, Sasaki Chiho?"

"Does Gabriel-san know the reasons behind Lailah-san's actions?"

"Yeah, mostly. We did not contact each other, so I do not know the details..... but I know that she is married and what happened when the Demon King invaded Ente Isla. In addition, I also indirectly knew about Emilia's existence."

Gabriel probably knew that when he discovered the 'Yesod' fragments on the holy sword and the Evil Repelling Armour.

"Sigh, I'm different from Lailah, I'm an opportunist. Lailah chose to leave and I chose to stay. This was a huge difference, so it's not strange even if we do not contact each other for a few hundred years. However, all of you should have encountered similar situations, right? A friend who you have not contacted in years suddenly asks you out for tea one day and nonchalantly talks about things from the past. It kind of feels like that."

It might feel similar, but to humans, a few months and a few hundred years were overwhelmingly different.

"Can I treat this as a chat and ask you a few questions?"

"What questions?"

"Lailah-san hopes that Maou-san and Yusa-san can save the humans of Ente Isla, right?"

"This is not completely correct, but it will probably end up like that in the end."

“Then..... how long might it take?”

“Chi-chan?”

Chiho’s tone did not contain any hesitation; it was very serious.

“Why do you want to know this?”

“When Gabriel-san kidnapped Yusa-san and Ashiya-san before, I could only wait here. Because I will drag everyone down, I never planned to follow from the start. Maou-san and Suzuno-san also told me that they would ‘return’ as soon as possible. However, for such a huge project such as saving the humans of a world, it shouldn’t be solved in one week like before, right?”

“Hm, then, how long do you think it would take? Since you’re one of the witnesses appointed by the Demon King, you should have gotten a certain amount of explanation from Lailah, right?”

“.....Yes.”

Chiho remembered the contents of Lailah’s world crisis file and nodded.

“Based on my estimates, the shortest would be less than one month. The longest could be more than a hundred years.”

“Eh!”

“W-What?”

“A hundred years~~?”

“.....”

Suzuno and Emerada stood up in shock because they did not know about the contents of the file and what Lailah had said, Gabriel raised his eyebrow in admiration while Maou still had his head lowered.

“Sasaki Chiho, you’re amazing after all. I can understand why Lailah views you so highly. Can I ask how you managed to deduce this time?”

Gabriel did not deny Chiho’s words and asked a new question.

“Lailah-san and Gabriel-san have been preparing for a few hundred years for this plan. Even both of you, with strong power and a long lifespan, needed to spend so much time on preparation for this job. This means that this will not

end so easily. This is one of the reasons. However, at the same time, if a few coincidences and conditions can be met, it might end unexpectedly easy."

"Yeah. However, this does not seem to be all of it."

"Yes."

Chiho nodded.

"Alas=Ramus, a fragment of the 'Yesod' Sephirah is together with Lailah-san's daughter, Yusa-san. As for Acies-chan, she is with Maou-san, a demon. If it is this state, a very long drawn out battle may be possible."

"W,-Wait, Chiho-dono. This is too strange."

"What's wrong, Suzuno-san?"

"Even if it is a drawn out battle, a hundred years is too long, don't you think? Not considering the Demon King, what about Emilia? Even Emilia's journey to fight the Demon King took around five years....."

"This is a different situation from fighting Maou-san. Because Lailah-san wishes for Maou-san and Yusa-san....."

Chiho calmly declared this fact.

".....to defeat God."

""Wha.....""

Suzuno and Emerada both sucked in a breath.

"God huh..... actually creating an environment where such a thing could appear, how unfortunate."

Only Amane appeared disinterested, snatching one of Acies's fries.

"Chi-chan, there's no need to say so much....."

Maou tried to stop Chiho from saying such an important fact to everyone while they were chatting in the Moz Burger at Nerima station, but he was stopped by Gabriel.

"Isn't this just a chat? These are things you already know about anyway, and the negotiations will only take place between Lailah, you, and Emilia. However,

they also have the right to know about the truth and think about it.”

After Gabriel finished his drink, he placed the cup on the table.

“They also have the right to want to help the two of you, right? After all, as long as Crestia Bell and Emerada Etuva are humans of Ente Isla, they are in the position of being saved by the two of you.”

“.....Let me say this first.”

These words sound very reasonable, but Maou did not want to hear this coming from Gabriel. Maou, unable to think of a way to rebuke Gabriel, glared at him and reminded Suzuno and Emerada.

“With regards to this, I have not said anything about wanting to accept this.”

“Y-Yeah, but Demon King, what do Alsiel and Lucifer think about this.....”

“Of course, Alsiel said that it should be left alone. As for Urushihara, he didn’t say anything about it at all.”

“.....He didn’t say anything about it?”

Maou wanted to emphasise that everything was as per usual, but with everything which had happened so far, Suzuno would not fall for it just like that.

“Demon King, you should stop already. You’re saying these half truths again.”

“Huh?”

Suzuno pouted a little and glared at Maou.

“If that guy really didn’t want to do it, how is it possible that he did not say ‘I am determined not to take part in such a troublesome thing, please don’t count me in.’ Since he did not interrupt at all, doesn’t it mean that he cannot ignore this as well?”

Maou subconsciously showed an expression of guilt.

“I do not want to endorse Gabriel’s words, but I am also very worried about the issues surrounding the two of you. Please trust me a little.”

“.....Ah..... what, seriously..... what is this?”

Chiho was unable to look at Suzuno’s pleading expression directly. Maou, who

had fell silent while covering his face, said this.

“Maou-san. I do not wish to separate from Maou-san and Yusa-san as well. If it’s just one year, I can still bear with it like what Gabriel-san had said. However, I cannot wait for one hundred years. If Maou-san and Yusa-san are together for one hundred years, even I will feel jealous.”

“Oh~ Chiho! You said it so boldly!”

“Yeah, because I like Maou-san and Yusa-san the most.”

Chiho boldly faced Acies’s half joking cheer head on.

“Not just me. People of Ente Isla like Suzuno-san and Emerada-san, and the people of Japan like Kisaki-san, Rika-san, Shimizu-san, and Kawacchi-san..... there are many people who like Maou-san and Yusa-san. These people probably do not wish for their important friends to leave them to go to a faraway place for one hundred years. So I want to ask. With regards to what should be done next and why did things turn out like this.”

“Lailah hasn’t told all of you everything?”

“Gabriel-san should know things which Lailah-san doesn’t know, right? And didn’t you tell Lailah-san that you would handle the rest?”

“.....Sigh. So troublesome.”

The opposite from what he was saying, Gabriel looked very happy.

“And Lailah-san still has not mentioned any necessary compensation to Maou-san and Yusa-san, nor has she laid out any plans for compensation.”

“Is it with regards to metal? Or having the strong people do something?”

Gabriel listed out strange analogies with regards to the term ‘compensation’, causing Maou to show an unhappy expression once again.

Suzuno seemed to have been bothered by the word ‘metal’, but Chiho spoke before Suzuno could remember anything, “I don’t really understand your analogies, but it should be the latter.” Chiho said with a challenging gaze, “I have not heard anything from Lailah-san or Gabriel-san on how you plan to fill up the gaps in the work shifts at MgRonalds during the time Maou-san and Yusa-san are not in Japan.”

A person disappearing from the place where they normally stay.

Chiho already knew how heavy this occurrence was.

“Gaps in the work shifts, huh. Hahaha.”

The person who felt that Chiho’s serious words were interesting and laughed, was Amane.

“I don’t dislike that train of thought. I like it quite a bit, in fact.”

Amane, who had been disinterested and ignoring the conversation between Maou and the others so far, only paying attention to Iron, leaned forward for the first time.

“If I had to choose, my position in this would be closer to Chiho-chan. Because I am someone who is always being troubled by others. Honestly, compared to all the humans located on some unknown planet, the lives of Chiho-chan and Rika-chan, people on this side (Earth), are much more important to me.”

“Amane-san.....”

“Because I am also someone related to the Sephirah.”

Amane smiled, showing her teeth which appeared whiter than usual due to her tanned skin, and reminded Gabriel.

“You’d better not misunderstand that Chiho-chan is placing the working environment of a small hamburger shop and the humans of a world on a scale and measuring them, okay? What this child is taking to compare with what all of you want to save are the lives of the ‘humans’ Maou Sadao and Yusa Emi, the many lives of the people who are connected to these two, and her own life. If you do not understand this weight, then even if Maou-kun and Yusa-chan can accept it, Chiho-chan will most definitely not be able to do so. This child will definitely put her life at stake to stop Maou-kun and the others. And then she will wish for the humans of Ente Isla to go extinct.”

“I dislike people putting their lives on the line. If the Demon King and Emilia have accepted it yet there are still people who would do such a thing, I would want to get rid of those obstacles.”

“At that moment, Aunt Miki-T and I would become your enemies. You should

know that very well, right?”

“Yeah~”

Gabriel was a guardian angel of the Sephirah.

So more than anyone, he knew how scary the Sephirah could be.

“Alright, I will confess honestly. Lailah does not seem to be planning to do this, but even if it needs to take a hundred years or longer, or if there is a need to restrict the Demon King’s or Emilia’s freedom, I plan to make them continue doing this task. I know saying this will be disadvantageous to Lailah’s negotiations later on, but from a macroscopic point of view, having Alsiel go and help out in the Eastern Continent before also has something to do with this task. Unfortunately, with regards to the rewards for taking up a hundred years of their time and their compensations for the other benefits which they should have gotten during this period of time, I have no idea about that at all.”

“But~~ let’s not talk about the compensation first~~ even if Emilia is still alive after a hundred years~~ wouldn’t she become a granny by that time~~?”

Faced with Emerada’s natural question, Gabriel also responded as if it was natural.

“Do you think Emilia will live and die like a normal human? She is half an angel, you know?”

“W-What do you mean?”

Emerada became speechless, as if she had received a huge shock.

“How long do you think I, Lailah, Sariel, and Lucifer have maintained this current appearance? When angels have grown to the certain degree and their bodies have reached their strongest stage, they will no longer grow or age and

will spend an eternity looking like this. The situation of a Fallen Angel may be different, but Sariel had already proved that he was unable to make Emilia a Fallen.”

That was true, Sariel did have the Evil Eye of the Fallen which can make angels fall, but when Emi was exposed to that beam of light before, although her holy magic had decreased, she did not lose the power of controlling Better Half or her half-angel ability to transform.

“It might not be as long as a demon or angel, but it should be a very long lifespan, right? I don’t know how many hundred years this Demon King has lived for, but he is still considered quite young in the Demon World. At least he has not reached even one tenth of mine or Lailah’s years.”

“As long as they have reached a certain stage of growth in their life, the age afterwards isn’t an issue?”

“This might sound like something an outstanding young person would say, but no matter how outstanding the young person is, the ‘accumulated life experience’ is still the same as a normal person. They exaggeratedly say that adults cannot just look at age when they are young, but they will still use the current era as the reason to criticise young people when they are old, I have seen many of those interesting people. This is something which is off topic. If I continue to talk about this with the Demon King, it might be taken as a ‘negotiation’. I wish to continue chatting with the ladies after this. If the Demon King doesn’t want to listen to this, why don’t you go back first?”

“.....Annoying.”

Maou stood up unhappily, took out his wallet, and walked towards the counter.

It seemed like he had felt that it was awkward if he kept sitting there without ordering anything.

Gabriel watched Maou’s back as he walked away, then continued speaking, “Then, Sasaki Chiho may have mentioned about having to defeat God just now, but it is impossible for there to be a human who is more superior than us ‘angels’. To save the humans of Ente Isla, a certain person needs to be defeated, and because that person is an existence who is responsible for

leading us angels, it's not wrong to call that person God either. There are other troublesome people such as Kamael and Raguel, who all of you know, but honestly, they aren't that significant when compared to her."

".....Her?"

Gabriel nodded in response to Suzuno's question, and looked at Acies and Iron, both eating continuously next to Amane.

"That's right, slowly killing off the people who truly need these children, the boss of the parasites (us)."

As if he felt that the reaction of Chiho and the others were interesting, Gabriel rested his elbows on the table and opened his mouth to speak.

"Before it became like this, she was a great ruler, scientist, and warrior, a noble and compassionate figure. However, from a certain point in time, she stepped into a realm which humans absolutely should not touch, and the result was the extinction of almost all the humans on the planet."

"That planet~~ refers to another foreign world which is neither Ente Isla or Earth, right~~?"

When Emerada, who still could not really accept cosmology, asked this—

"You can think of it that way."

—Gabriel answered firmly.

"Because of her experience at that time, even if what she is doing currently is also a great sin, she still wrongly believes that doing so will benefit the Ente Isla humans. Unfortunately, there aren't many people who share the same thoughts as Lailah and me. Kamael is her top believer. Actually because of that, he suffered a terrible loss in the earlier incident at the Eastern Continent."

Gabriel stared at Maou as he appeared to be ordering dessert at the counter.

"The plan which we hope that the Demon King and Emilia will carry out, was originally proposed by another person. Lailah and I have only inherited that person's will. I place my life as top priority, so I did not carry it out as seriously as Lailah did. However, as I observed Ente Isla more, the information I gathered only proved that the proposer of the plan was correct. However, she was

unwilling to understand it. One day, the two of them broke apart and fought in a battle. She obtained victory, and ‘he’ lost.”

Gabriel spoke as if he was cherishing a memory of the distant past.

“The one who told us the truth and spilt Heaven into half that day, that man’s name was Sataniel. His name when he was still human was Sataniel Noi.”

“Satan.....iel?”

Someone repeated that name and could not help but look in the direction of the counter where the young man stood with his back facing them.

In the past, there was also a person named ‘Satan’ in Heaven?

Chiho had an impression of that existence. And her predictions were immediately confirmed.

“He was the ‘Ancient Demon King Satan’, whose name was spread all over the Demon World. In addition, the ‘reason’ or the ‘mastermind’ of the ‘Demon King Satan’s Disaster’ refers to him.”

Suzuno widened her eyes in surprise, Chiho also sucked in a breath as she remembered the past which Ashiya had described to her.

“He’s human?”

“The Ancient Demon King..... the one who unified the Demon World before Maou-san.....”

“That’s right.”

Gabriel smirked as if he was expecting both their reactions.

“And the one who killed the Ancient Demon King, our leader who created the current Heaven, also known as God, her name is.....”

“The thing known as God should not appear in front of humans.”

Amane spoke to herself in an unexpectedly strong tone, but it was meaningless in the face of what Gabriel said next.

“Her name is Ignora. Lucifer’s mother.”

Author, Afterword –AND YOU–

The afterword this time reveals some of the plot in the book.

For those readers who start reading from the afterword, please take note of this.

Until now, the story of ‘Hataraku Maou-sama!’ has maintained a situation where as long as one has read the volumes published by Dengeki Bunko, they will not feel lost when reading the new publications.

However, if there are readers who have not read the short stories which have been published in the Dengeki Bunko MAGAZINE, those which have not been recorded in the volumes, when they read part of the plot written in this volume—

“Eh? Was there such a plot or setting before?”

This question might arise.

Please do not worry. Such a thing does exist.

There have been some characters or plot points which were added from the anime into the novel, but in order to keep up the philosophy of not affecting the reader’s experience as long as they have read the volumes published by Dengeki Bunko, I have been extra careful when introducing these elements.

However, in the thirteenth volume of ‘Hataraku Maou-sama!’, many parts were built upon the plots of these short stories, and the incidents in these short stories also occurred in the official history of this work.

It is not so bad that people who have not read these short stories will not be able to follow the story, but causing everyone who has not read the Dengeki Bunko MAGAZINE to feel an information gap, I am really sorry about that.

I am not sure if this can be considered compensation, but in the future, for

those short stories which have been published in Dengeki Bunko MAGAZINE but not recorded in the volumes, I will definitely turn them into a book and deliver it into everyone's hands.

I hope that everyone can wait for this.

This afterword now sounds like I am communicating official business, how rare.

This volume is a dense collection of many things which happened in the past, quickly accelerating the plot. However, time is still flowing, so in the end it is just a story of how a group of people who change clothes, work, eat, and sleep at home every day are accelerating their own lives based on their own decisions.

Unfortunately, Wagahara's writing speed has not increased all that much. Even so, I will still try my best to meet with everyone again as soon as possible.

Goodbye!



Translator's Notes and References

1. ↑ Komatsuna is Japanese Mustard Spinach.
2. ↑ Aries modified it from “Wholesalers will not sell stuff to customers based on the prices the customers want”, the meaning would be “you won’t get your way so easily!”
3. ↑ To those who are clueless about baseball, the fourth batter is normally known as the cleanup hitter, and in modern baseball is almost always one of the best hitters on the team, often the one with the most power and ability to drive in runs with extra-base hits (double, triple, or home run). To be given a Base on Balls by the ace pitcher on the other team meant that the pitcher deliberately pitches the ball away from the batter in order to issue a Base on Balls, commonly done to bypass one batter for one the defensive team believes is less likely to initiate a run-scoring play.
4. ↑ Excentricksior Café is a parody of Excelsior Café, an actual café at Sasazuka station.
5. ↑ An Izakaya is a type of informal Japanese gastropub. They are casual places for after-work drinking.
6. ↑ Manmaru Udon is a parody of Hanamaru Udon.

Hataraku Maou-sama! Volume 13

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